

GATES OF UNDERSTANDING

A SPIRITUAL MINISTRY PROJECT FOR INCARCERATED POPULATIONS

by

Rabbi Shaul Praver

A final project report submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Doctor of Ministry degree
at Hartford Seminary

May 2019

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

D.MIN. FINAL PROJECT REPORT

This is to certify that the D.Min. Final Project Report of

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has been approved by the Examining Committee for the final project requirement
for the Doctor of Ministry degree. May, 2019

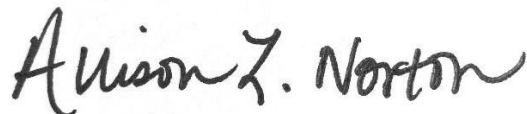
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ABSTRACT

Gates of Understanding was a twelve-week prison ministry program created by Doctor of Ministry candidate Rabbi Shaul Marshall Praver. The purpose of the program was to improve the quality of spiritual and practical daily life of vetted inmate populations of any faith, by engaging students in the study of impactful therapeutic literature, discussions, audio-visual selections and dynamic activities. Students were introduced to self-help literature, journaling, meditating, and transmitting loving energy through pro-social behaviors. Three corollary purposes included (1) introducing Connecticut prisons to a spiritual type of ministry appropriate for people of all faiths; (2) expanding the role of the traditional denominational chaplain to a spiritual leader ministering to people of all faiths; (3) creating an ecumenical program derived from Judaism and offering it in prisons alongside existing programs like Twelve-Step, Yoga and Mindfulness Meditation.

The manuscript, Spiritual Guide for the Incarcerated, was authored by Rabbi Praver in support of his doctoral degree and served as the core curriculum. The work covered all characteristics needed for a healthy spiritual pro-social life and directed students to focus on a daily routine of five key activities: (1) Study, (2) Prayer, (3) Meditation, (4) Acts of Loving Kindness (5) Exercise and Nutrition.

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Officiated at the national Sandy Hook Memorial Service with President Obama.
Advocated successfully before Connecticut Congress for passage of common-sense gun laws.
Advocated with Rabbi David Saperstein at National Mall in Washington D.C. for safeguarding human lives threatened by gun violence.
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Newtown Interfaith Clergy Group (ongoing)
Global Coalition for Peace and Civility (ongoing)
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Newsweek Magazine, America's 50 most influential Rabbis in 2013
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Cantors Assembly Yuval award, 2013
Connecticut Jewish Ledger, Connecticut "Movers and Shakers" list of the year, 2006
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Gates of Understanding and Spiritual Guide for the Incarcerated were created for the 2.2 million incarcerated people in the United States who need to hear the still small voice calling to them from the midst of the thunder.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I acknowledge my deepest gratitude to my instructors at Hartford Seminary, especially Dr. Scott Thumma and Rev. Dr. Donna Schaper, who nurtured, challenged, and inspired my very best efforts. Spiritual Guide for the Incarcerated and *Gates of Understanding* are the fruits of our blessed affiliation. Last and most importantly, I acknowledge my deepest gratitude to my beloved family, especially my cherished wife, Beth Levenson Praver, who managed the affairs of our household, along with her own important work, so that I could be present for this project.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. What Was the Project?	1
2. Purpose of the Project	3
3. Cultural Context of the Project	7
4. The Theology that Drives the Project	29
5. What Occurred in the Project	57
6. Evaluation of the Project	114
7. Summary of the Project	127
Appendix	129
Bibliography	133

CHAPTER 1

WHAT WAS THE PROJECT?

Gates of Understanding was a twelve-session spiritual interfaith prison ministry program offered to inmates at York Correctional Institution (referred to as York), the only woman's state correctional facility for Connecticut located in Niantic, and inmates at Garner Correctional Institution (referred to as Garner), a men's facility in Newtown, the state's correctional facility most dedicated to serving the needs of incarcerated men with significant mental health needs. Both Garner and York are level 4 institutions—very high security institutions. The curriculum was based on the original work I authored, Spiritual Guide for the Incarcerated (Appendix A). Both groups met in a classroom and on average fifteen students attended each session. Each group had twenty-two students enrolled. The program took place from September 2017, through January 2018, with graduation ceremonies taking place in February and March of 2018. Students were required to read chapters from the Spiritual Guide each week and come to class prepared to discuss the content. The core lessons were reinforced through a series of dynamic classroom activities. Core skills and concepts taught in the book include: self-esteem, self-introspection, discernment, spiritual identity, humor, attachment to pleasure, detachment from pain, honesty, gratitude, positive thinking, perseverance, self-control, breath meditation, loving kindness meditation, identifying seeds of holiness, elevating base desires, embracing faith as a force for healing, overcoming drug addiction, generosity, acceptance, optimism, critical thinking, versatility of thought, compassionate listening, free will, forgiveness and harnessing the power of love.

Classroom time consisted of dynamic activities, discussions about the activities, discussions about the reading, checking in, sharing journal writings, watching selected video clips and discussing them. We had one guest speaker, Scarlet Lewis, author of *Nurturing Healing Love*.¹ The theme of her lecture was forgiveness and the power of loving thoughts. Ms. Lewis is mother of Jesse Lewis, a young hero who was slain while saving half of his first-grade class in Sandy Hook, Newtown, Connecticut.

Dynamic activities included trust games, appropriately expressing love and admiration for other classmates, role playing and role reversals, reenacting and reframing difficult encounters with the aid of spiritual tools, exploring alternate meanings of traumatic experiences, and the Nazarite vow before three judges. I will describe these activities in greater detail in the Chapter 5, "What Occurred in the Project."

Gates of Understanding teaches powerful spiritual techniques and skills rooted in ancient Jewish traditions that can impact favorably upon the wellbeing of incarcerated people of all faiths and walks of life. Spiritual Guide for the Incarcerated, along with the Facilitator's Manual, can be valuable instruments of transformation for generations to come. Contained in the Spiritual Guide is Jewish wisdom transposed into universal terminology that may serve as an effective resource at a time when major prison reforms are unfolding in the United States, and people are increasingly opting for spirituality instead of religion.

¹ Scarlett Lewis, "Nurturing Healing Love: A Mother's Journey of Hope and Forgiveness," October 29, 2013, (Date Accessed, April 27, 2019) www.nurturinghealinglove.com As gun violence in the US continues, Scarlett Lewis still has just one response. Choose Love. In 2012, her six-year-old son, Jesse Lewis, became one of the victims of the Sandy Hook Elementary School mass shooting which shocked the world. The morning he was murdered he wrote these words, "Nurturing Healing Love," on a blackboard in his home before he went to school.

CHAPTER 2 PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT

The primary purpose of the program was to improve the quality of spiritual and practical daily life of vetted inmate populations of any faith by engaging them in the study of highly impactful therapeutic literature, discussions, audio-visual selections and dynamic activities. Because this program proved to be successful, the next step was to identify and analyze the most and least effective parts of the program with the goal of improving it for future iterations.

The program was devised to transcend an administrative limitation built into the way chaplain services are delivered in Connecticut correctional facilities. The problem is a heavy emphasis on denominationalism, which leaves little room for interfaith or universal spiritual ministry at a time when nearly one third of the U.S. population inside and outside of prisons, consider themselves spiritual, but not religious and approximately two-thirds consider themselves spiritual and religious.² In response to this sociological shift, *Gates of Understanding* created a new set of conditions to formally meet the needs of people of all faiths who fit into this demographic group.

In addition to enriching the spiritual, emotional and social quality of student life in Connecticut correctional facilities, the program accomplished three corollary purposes: (1) the

² Michael Lipka and Claire Gecewicz, "More Americans Now Say They're Spiritual but Not Religious," September 6, 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/09/06/more-americans-now-say-theyre-spiritual-but-not-religious/>, (Date of Access, December 15, 2018).

According to a 2017 Pew Research finding, on average, 23% of the United States population between the ages of 18 to 65, consider themselves spiritual, but not religious. The lowest demographic is 17% among 65 and older, and the highest demographic is 32% among college graduates

introductions of an interfaith spiritual ministry into the annals of Connecticut state prisons; (2) the expansion of a Jewish chaplain into a chaplain authorized to conduct a spiritual program for people of all faiths; and (3) the introduction of universal spirituality, derived primarily from Judaism, which brought new perspectives strongly welcomed by the students, in a landscape heavily dominated by Christian-based programs.

Concerning the first of these corollary purposes, while this interfaith program was a significant change from the current form in which ministry is disseminated in Connecticut's state correctional facilities, it is, however, not the only example of interfaith ministry. The twelve-step programs derived from the Christian faith are offered in correctional facilities throughout the country to people of all faiths. Likewise, yoga and mindfulness meditation derived, from the Hindu tradition, are offered in many correctional facilities to people of all faiths. *Gates of Understanding* is the first program in the country derived from the Jewish tradition that is also offered to people of all faiths.

Moreover, Spiritual Guide for the Incarcerated, is the first Judaic based self-help book written to specifically address the spiritual concerns of incarcerated populations of all faiths including secularists and humanists. It is my belief that the universal truths found in Judaism offer a practical quality that is particularly efficacious for incarcerated populations. I also admit to a measure of pride and pleasure for bringing the wisdom of my own heritage to the marketplace of ideas in Connecticut's state correctional facilities. Judaism's universal teachings comfortably intersect and support the universal teachings of Christianity. It is my hope that *Gates of Understanding* will be accorded a space to co-exist alongside worthy programs already offered in U.S. correctional facilities.

Concerning the second corollary purpose, chaplains working for the Connecticut Department of Correction have only informal opportunities to minister to people outside their

faith group. These informal opportunities occur during pastoral tours of housing units when individual inmates engage the chaplain in conversation, or when a chaplain is needed to inform an inmate that a member of their family has died. A chaplain may also initiate ecumenical conversations with inmates or simply inquire about the welfare of inmates. However, to enroll people of different faiths into one religious program is against Administrative Directive 10.8, Paragraph 5, section B:

All collective religious activity is strictly by denomination. An inmate may participate in a collective religious activity only for the religious denomination indicated on his/her "Request for Designation of religion Form". There is no collective religious activity which includes inmates of different religious denominations.³

As such, *Gates of Understanding* has fashioned itself as a spiritual service provider outside the auspices of the religious service department; it is administered through the department of education. In this manner, it could be conducted alongside yoga, mindfulness meditation and the twelve-step programs.

It stands in stark contrast to programs such as Kairos Prison Ministry and A Purpose Driven Life that are also taking place in Connecticut correctional facilities. These are Protestant programs and only Protestants can attend per Administrative Directive 10.8 et al. The same policy holds true for all denominational programs. Gates of Understanding is more akin to Houses of Healing, a popular psychology-based program offered at York through the aegis of the education department. I will speak about other programs I admire and learned from in the fifth chapter, "What Happened in the Project."

On a practical note, prior to the *Gates of Understanding* program, I was unable to enroll and vet multifaith students from the general prison population. With *Gates of Understanding*, I

³ State of Connecticut, Department of Corrections, Approved by Commissioner Scott Semple, Directive number 10.8, paragraph 5 section B, Effective date 12/03/2018, Supersedes Religious Services dated 9/14/2014, Title Religious Services.

became empowered to gather people of all faiths or no faith, who have an intrinsic interest in learning.

While the overarching purpose of the ministry is for improvements in spiritual and practical life to lead to successful return to society, that outcome is beyond the scope of this study. Findings of that scope require a longitudinal study of at least five years. Moreover, because the group is self-selecting, it is hard to definitively establish one program as the cause for the success in longitudinal studies. As such, the scope of this study is limited to observing students adopting spiritual practices such as journaling, meditation, studying and pro-social attitudes in class and in daily life.

These pro-social behaviors included thoughtful non-reactive responses during stressful encounters and a greater sense of vulnerability observed as students expressed their emotions more freely, including crying, laughing, and sharing personal stories about their hopes, dreams, and fears. These observations will be shared in greater detail in Chapter 5, “What Happened in the Project.”

CHAPTER 3 CULTURAL CONTEXT OF THE PROJECT

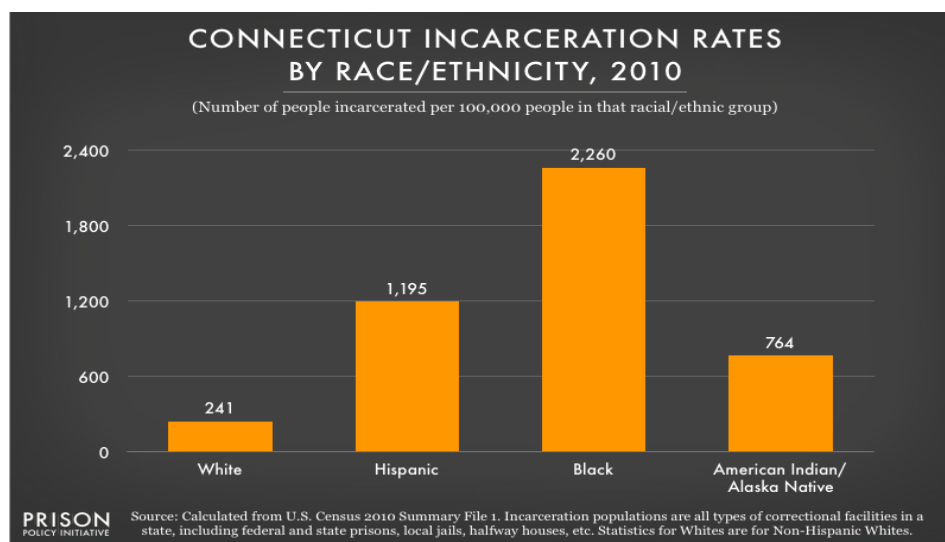


Figure 1

This chart is helpful for quickly understanding the per-capita racial demographics of inmates in Connecticut; it is calculated from the 2010 U.S. Census.⁴ At Garner, the racial composition of the graduating class was 11 black (61%) three Hispanic (17%), and four white (22%) At York, the racial composition of the graduating class was 14 white (78%) three black (17%), and one Asian (5%). Participants were not asked to self-identify their race, but during the 12-week program, the racial ethnic groups in which they identified were discerned. In future

⁴ Leah Sakala, "Breaking Down Mass Incarceration in the 2010 Census: State-by-State Incarceration Rates by Race/Ethnicity," May 2014, <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/rates.html>. (Date of Access December 15, 2018.)

offerings, I will have participants formally self-identify their race at the first class through a demographic questionnaire to steer clear of making erroneous assumptions and enabling me to have this information from the start.

The big contrast is that in the men's group at Garner the majority of participants were black, whereas among the women at York the majority were white. The women's group had one Asian, but no Hispanic students. I also observed that among the Garner graduates, there were twelve Protestants, two Roman Catholics, one Muslim, and one Israelite.⁵ Among the York graduates, there were eight Protestants, four Roman Catholics, two Jews, one Muslim, and one Buddhist.

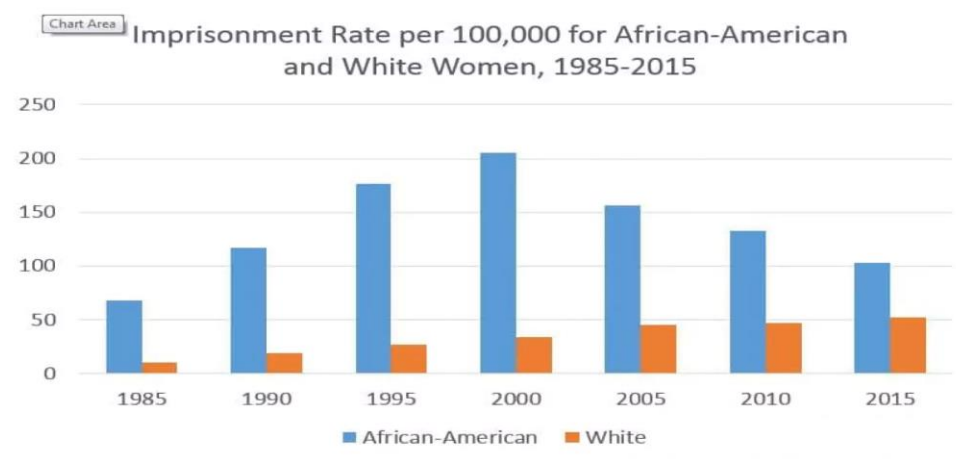
Careful analysis of this data shows that at Garner, most of the participants were black, and the minority were white, which was more consistent with the 2010 statewide demographic. Interestingly, consideration of the demographics for York graduates showed a white majority (78%) that was significantly higher than the racial demographics of the facility. As of March 31, 2018, the racial demographics of York were:

White	534 (55%)
Black	248 (25%)
Hispanic	184 (19%)
American Indian	4 (0%)
Asian	6 (1%) ⁶

The high percentage of white women in the prison population is not at all surprising for those following the trends since 1985, as shown in the chart below.

⁵Many African Americans identify as Israelite, not Jewish, but feel a greater kinship towards Judaism than Christianity. Most Igbo Nigerians regard themselves as Israelite even though most are practicing Christians. They trace their lineage to the tribe of Gad, the seventh son of Jacob. Gad had three sons who settled in southeastern Nigeria. These three sons were, Eri, Arodi and Areli and are mentioned in Genesis 46:16. Nigerians testify that their Israelite ancestors established clans and kingdoms whose remnants can be found today in the towns of Owerri, Umuleri, Arochukwu and Aguleri.

⁶ State of Connecticut Department of Correction internal data.



Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics

Figure 2⁷

Table two (above), shows that as of 2015, approximately twice as many black women were incarcerated than white women on a per capita rate per 100,000. Still, the rate of white women entering prison is increasing overall. According to a Bureau of Justice 2016 statistic,⁸ there were more than twice as many white females (48,900 prisoners) as black (20,300) or Hispanic (19,300) females in state and federal prison. The York 2018 demographics bear a resemblance to these 2015 national statistics. As for higher rate of white women (78%) enrolled in *Gates of Understanding*, compared with their (55%) presence in the overall York facility, this disparity may be explained in part, by the fact that unlike in the Garner group, two students from my women's Jewish group, one white and one Asian, assisted me in the planning, choosing and vetting of the class roster. These assistants recommended four white women to the program. On account of these recommendations, these four white women were put onto the roster where they remained unless a more impressive applicant displaced them. However, just

⁷ E. Ann Carson, Ph.D. and Elizabeth Anderson, "Prisoners In 2015" *Bureau of Justice Statistics*, December 29, 2016. Presents final counts of prisoners under the jurisdiction of state and federal correctional authorities at year end 2015, including admissions, releases, noncitizen inmates, and inmates age 17 or younger. The report describes prisoner populations by jurisdiction, most serious offense, and demographic characteristics. Also cited in *The Washington Post*, Economic Policy by Keith Humphreys, January 24, 2017.

⁸ Bureau of Justice Statistics, "Prisoners in 2016," January 2016, (Date of Access April 27, 2019) https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/p16_sum.pdf

because a more impressive applicant did not displace them, did not mean they would have necessarily made the class roster had they not been recommended. Had no recommendations been made, and these four seats were filled by black women, the demographics of the class would have matched the 55% percentage of white women in the facility.

Even though most women at York are white, according to the same Bureau of Justice Statistics 2016 census, incarcerated black women are 96 per 100,000, almost double the per capita rate of incarcerated white women who are 49 per 100,000. The cause of this higher per capita rate of black women in prison is beyond the scope of this paper.

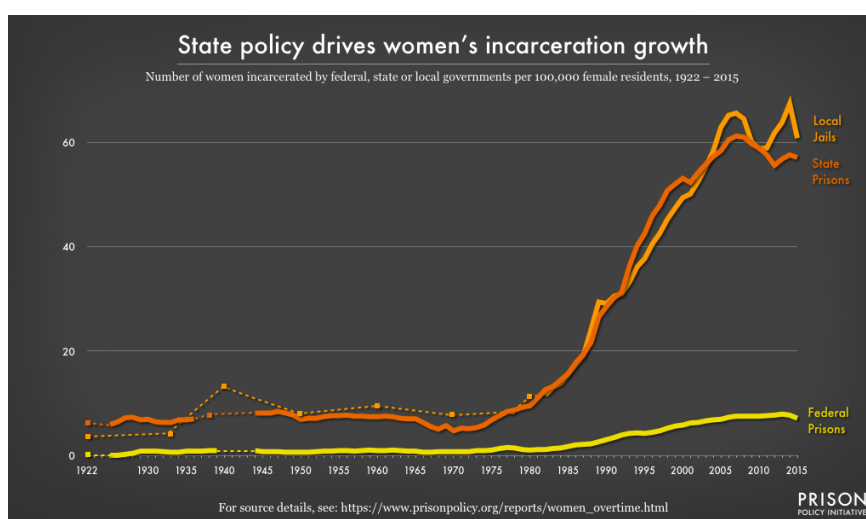


Figure 3⁹

At Garner, I had no inmate assistants recommending students to the roster. Twenty-two applicants were selected from a pool of 30 applicants who were paired down to 22, of which 16 graduated. Whereas participants at York were selected from a pool of 107 applicants who were paired down to 22, of which 16 graduated. Without the above-mentioned recommendations from inmate assistants at York, and in consideration of the 107 applicants, it

⁹ Prison Policy Initiative, "State policy drives women's incarceration growth," 2015, (Date accessed) April 15, 2019.

is likely that there would have been more black women filling the seats causing the class roster to resemble more closely the demographics of the facility.

Concerning the huge disparity found between black-to-white among incarcerated males,¹⁰ black males ages 18 to 19 were 11.8 times more likely to be imprisoned than white males of the same age. At the end of 2016, federal and state prisons in the United States held about 486,900 inmates who were black and 439,800 who were white – a difference of 47,100, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics. In 2009, by comparison, there were 584,800 blacks and 490,000 whites – a difference of 94,800. (This analysis counts only inmates sentenced to more than a year.) The decline in the black-white gap between 2009 and 2016 was driven by a 17% decrease in the number of black inmates during that span, which outpaced a 10% decrease in the number of white inmates. The key distinction in terms of demographics among incarcerated men compared with incarcerated women, is simply that male facilities have mostly black inmates and women’s facilities have mostly white inmates. The reason for this disparity is beyond the scope of this report.

A. My Assets

An asset I drew upon was a strong working relationship with the deputy wardens in charge of treatment and programs in both facilities—Kimberly Jones of Garner Correctional Institute and Jeffrey Zegarzewski of York Correctional Institute. Both Deputy Warden Zegarzewski and Deputy Warden Jones authorized me to do *Gates of Understanding* in their respective facilities and disseminated their authorization down the chain of command. A room was provided, the program was put onto the facility schedule, I had use of a television/video player and permission was granted to provide the participants notebooks, pens and literature. I

¹⁰ The Pew Research Center, “The gap between the number of blacks and whites in prison is shrinking,” January 18, 2018, (Date of Access April 27, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/01/12/shrinking-gap-between-number-of-blacks-and-whites-in-prison/>)

also drew upon my ability to counsel people and bring the spiritual content of multiple faith traditions to people who were hungry and thirsty for spiritual engagement. I have been involved with interfaith programming for over 20 years and drew upon that body of experience in this ministry setting.

Other chaplains at York included Rev. Joan Burnett (Protestant), the chaplain coordinator for the facility, Rev. Eric Jeuland (Protestant) and Sister Jerilyn Hunihan (Roman Catholic Nun). Other chaplains at Garner included Deacon Mark Stevens, who serves as the chaplain coordinator for the facility, Rev. Dr. Michael Christie (Black Baptist), Aaron Athey (Native American), and Imam Kenneth Muhammad (Muslim). All these chaplains were completely supportive of *Gates of Understanding*. Chaplain coordinators Burnett and Stevens helped me in substantial and logistical ways for which I am abundantly appreciative. This included helping me secure space and time in their respective facilities to run Gates of Understanding.

B. My Challenges

My major challenges related to my work schedule, the large number of facilities I serve, and their locations. On average, I spend only three hours per week in every facility I serve. In addition to Garner and York, I serve six other correctional facilities in Connecticut. These facilities are spread throughout the state and nearly one third of my time is spent in transit. I must, therefore, be extraordinarily resourceful with my time. And given that a program such as *Gates of Understanding* requires a greater measure of interaction and coordination with staff, being unable to dedicate the necessary time doing so, put some aspects of my program at risk. A person who does not work for the Department of Correction or who does not work for multiple facilities, may have more time to speak with the custody staff and coordinate logistics at greater

leisure. My solution was to volunteer additional hours of my personal time beyond the requirements of my work schedule.

C. York Correctional Institute

According to York Correctional Institute's website, the huge 425-acre sprawling campus sits on an old farm and is the only institution for female offenders in Connecticut. York receives inmates from all superior courts in Connecticut and serves all pretrial and sentenced female offenders. York has two campuses, the high-security west side and the low-security east side, with a booth house between them through which inmates, staff, and volunteers pass. The low-security inmates on the east side are permitted access to the high-security west side for religious services, school, medical and library programs, but high-security inmates from the west side are not permitted access to the low-security east side. Participants in the *Gates of Understanding* included inmates from both the east and west side of York.

Walking from one campus to the next, one can instantly feel the cultural shift. On the east side women walk freely with a relaxed gait whereas, on the west side, women walk dutifully in a straight line behind each other and from point A to point B without much meandering or socializing along on the way. Women from my Jewish group who were transferred from the west to the east side breathed a sigh of relief and talked about their new living arrangements in glowing terms: "What a pleasure," "I feel like a person again," and "It's actually not bad."

The Charlene Perkins Building is a reentry center started in 2005 and dedicated in honor of a past deputy warden. It has 100 beds and assists in preparing select female offenders who are within eighteen months of leaving with skills needed for reentry. In February 2016, this unit became the "Keys to Success" Community Reintegration Unit. In the spring of 2017, York opened a job training center that prepares inmates with practical skills such as resume writing,

job interviewing, filling out college applications, and applying for financial aid. Being knowledgeable on these topics, I was able to develop solid relationships in the facility. York is one of the facilities where Correctional Enterprise of Connecticut (CEC) manages a manufacturing site. CEC is active throughout the state, manufacturing many types of products that are in wide use throughout the state.

D. Garner Correctional Institute

According to Garner Correctional Institute's website, the Garner Correctional Institution incarcerates both pretrial and sentenced male offenders. Under the administration of then Commissioner Theresa C. Lantz, care and treatment for adult male offenders with significant mental health issues throughout the Department of Correction were consolidated at this level 4, high-security facility. Through a collaboration with the Department's contracted health and mental health care provider, the University of Connecticut's Correctional Managed Healthcare, the institution utilizes a highly progressive mental health treatment approach.

Individualized treatment plans based upon an offender's level of functionality include therapeutic programs in groups and one-on-one settings. The staff at the facility, both custody and mental health, operates through an integrated team approach that insures a continuity of custody, care, treatment, and control.

The program is designed to care for, educate, and prepare as many offenders as is possible to live successful lives in either a general population prison setting or, when appropriate, in the free world.

The facility is named in honor of Ward A. Garner, who served as warden of the Connecticut State Prison in Wethersfield from 1911-1918. The current number of employees is 294. Garner, opened on November 17, 1992 is a two-building facility located on 118 acres. The main building encompasses 245,000 square feet and houses all inmates and support services

and operations. A second building encompasses 15,100 square feet and is dedicated to maintenance operations. Since 1992, the facility has been adapting to an ever-changing climate within the Department by housing inmates in general population, close custody, and the mental health unit, as well as a cooperative effort to house federal high-security inmates. In 1993, a team of staff members at the Garner developed and implemented the Close Custody Phase Program for the management of incarcerated gang members.

E. A Prison Chaplain Is a Double Agent

Prison chaplains function as double agents in correctional facilities. Chaplains administer and advocate for the First Amendment rights for inmates, but at the same time work in partnership with custodial staff by enforcing prison rules. Sometimes an inmate's religious observance may conflict with legitimate security rules, in which case the rules must be followed. A common example where such a conflict occurs is when simulated training drills are taking place. At such times, movement of inmates throughout the building may be regarded by custody staff as an interference with a training program. Another example could be when a code has been called involving an incident such as a fight, an attempt to escape, a lost object such as a kitchen knife or an officer's identification card. While these activities are taking place, except for emergency medical needs, all other programs including religious worship services, are suspended. This is called a lockdown.

Chaplains go through the same training as the custody staff including behavioral management but interact with inmates in a much more spiritual and personal way. Behavior management is special hand to hand combat training. For chaplains who have cultivated relationships with inmates as a spiritual care giver, it is rare that a conflict would ever require escalating to the use of force. In the Maloney Training Academy in Cheshire, all prison professionals are taught that nearly all conflicts can be resolved using Inter-Personal Communication Skills (IPCS).

F. Inmate Language

It is also important to be able to understand the language of the inmates. When, for example, an inmate says, “The judge made me a bogus offer, I’m EOSing in 6 months, and he wants to give me three and six.” Unless you understand that “EOS” means “End of Sentence” and the inmate has turned the acronym into an action verb, you will not get the gist of what he or she is saying. In this case, the inmate had gone to court and the judge offered release from prison in three months with six months’ probation.

Since the inmate is “EOSing” in six months, I can understand that the judge’s offer was experienced as “bogus.” If the inmate had been “down” (incarcerated) for several years, waiting another three months and being free and clear of the Department of Correction is preferable to many. It is important to know that while on probation and parole, the inmate could “catch” (be charged with) a technical violation and get “hit” (adjudicated) with another “bid.”(sentence) However, it is also important to note that while EOS’ing is good for those reasons, being out of the jurisdiction of the DOC makes the returning citizen ineligible for certain state sponsored programs including some emergency housing opportunities. This is a light use of inmate jargon based on mostly legal terminology. There are many such terms and publications of inmate jargon. Different kinds of inmates, depending upon their background, will embrace varying degrees and types of prison slang.

G. Chain of Command

As mentioned, prison ministry exists in a very strong chain-of-command culture. For this reason, to facilitate the success of the program it is important to make time to sit down with wardens, deputy wardens, kitchen supervisors, religious coordinators, and the director of chaplains to procure their cooperation and support. It is also a good idea to connect with the Commissioner whenever he or she is on-site.

There are two categories of staff in correctional facilities: custody staff and non-custody staff. Non-custody staff include clergy, mental health counselors, doctors, nurses, dental hygienists, commissary, kitchen supervisors, administrators and so forth. Concerns about safety and security trump all other concerns and custody staff are in charge. If, for example, custody staff call a code due to a fight, medical emergency, a shake down¹¹ or even a simulated training drill, they can suspend religious services, school classes, professional visits, family visits and non-emergency medical visits with no advanced notice. For our purposes, in one of these circumstances, the religious service would conflict with an event dedicated to ensuring the safety and security of the facility. In this context, a temporary suspension of a First Amendment right is deemed “reasonable” and is permitted with certain restrictions and conditions which I will soon explain. There is a cultural reality that, on rare occasions, a member of the custody staff will inappropriately suspend religious services due to insufficient knowledge of the inmate’s First Amendment right to worship or as a punitive act for bad behavior. This is a shared concern of prison chaplains. I reiterate though that the overwhelming majority of custody staff whom I encountered, have been supportive of the religious rights of inmates.

H. Prison Rights under the Law

These dynamics and concerns are connected to an important piece of legislation called The Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000 (RLUIPA, pronounced, “Row-loopa”). For inmates held in state prisons, RLUIPA¹² protects their religious freedom. Whereas, the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993 (RFRA, pronounced “Raf-rah”) protects the religious rights of inmates held in federal facilities. Under the Free Exercise Clause of the First

¹¹ Prisoner Resources, “Searches, Shakedowns, and Contraband in Prison,” 2019, (Date accessed, April 30, 2019) <https://www.prisonerresource.com/prison-survival-guide/first-day-in-prison/searches-shakedowns-contraband/>

¹² The United States Department of Justice, “Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act,” 2000, (Date of Access, October 2018). <https://www.justice.gov/crt/religious-land-use-and-institutionalized-persons-act>,

Amendment, prison officials must provide inmates with a “reasonable opportunity” to exercise their religion without fear of penalty.

However, in certain circumstances, prison officials may restrict this right by imposing rules and regulations that interfere with sincerely held religious beliefs, providing that these rules and regulations reasonably relate to a legitimate function or goal of the prison such as a penological purpose or goal. These legitimate goals may include maintaining prison order, discipline, safety, or security. There are several court cases that have shaped the status of these laws.

Because inmates do not have an opportunity to fulfill their religious needs elsewhere, the First Amendment’s protection of citizens’ free exercise of religion gains heightened significance under the law.¹³ Legal scholars have coined it “The Free Exercise Clause.” Essentially, the state is empowered to employ its discretion as to what is a “reasonable exercise” of religion in a prison environment. The state must balance the First Amendment rights of inmates with the overall safety and security of the facility.

While not necessarily intentional, there tends to be a tug of war between the U.S. Supreme Court and the U.S. Congress, with the Court pulling in favor of state prisons and the Congress in favor of the prisoners. From my personal experience, “reasonable exercise” of religion in prison would include the inmates’ opportunity to attend weekly services, receive pastoral counseling, and participate in religious classes.

The more a chaplain can impress his or her unique persona upon custody staff, the stronger the interpersonal bond becomes, and the less likely custody staff will inappropriately cancel religious services. As such, for altruistic reasons and for utilitarian reasons, the chaplain

¹³ U.S. Bill of Rights, “The First Amendment,” <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/bill-of-rights-transcript#toc-amendment-i> (Date of Access, April 11, 2019).

must provide an informal spiritual service to custody staff to impress them with the value of spiritual leadership. To build this level of socialization, one must be flexible and willing to engage in conversation with custody staff at any point in the day. Chaplains must provide informal counseling to non-custody staff and on occasion, formal counseling when appropriate. A program that helps build this bridge between custody and non-custody staff at Garner, is our staff interfaith prayer service. We sit down together and take turns invoking improvised, spontaneous prayers. I am the only Jew in the group. The rest are Christians from a variety of denominations. Facility chaplain coordinator, Deacon Mark Stevens, in addition to reciting the Lord's Prayer at the end, always invites me to chant the three-fold blessing in Hebrew which is always warmly received. It is found in Numbers 6:24-26 as follows; "May The LORD bless you and protect you! May the Lord deal kindly and graciously with you! May the LORD bestow His favor upon you and grant you peace."

I. Admitting, Processing, and Profiles

Safety and security needs require separating some inmates from each other. When compiling a group of inmates to participate in a program, the list must be vetted using Admitting and Processing data, generally referred to as AP, to make sure inmates with a history of violence with one another, are not put in the same program. When an inmate has a history of fighting with another inmate, it is said that these inmates have a profile. Earlier we learned some inmate jargon, now we're learning some correctional officer (C/O) jargon. When an inmate has a profile, it does not mean he or she cannot participate in programs, it just means that he or she may not participate in the same program with the inmate with whom there is a profile. Some inmates have multiple profiles. According to Administrative Orders in the Department of Correction, having profiles could influence the administration in a decision to transfer an inmate with a profile to another facility where he or she has no existing profiles. This occurred to my inmate

assistant at Garner one week prior to the start of class. In my York group, none of the women had profiles, whereas among my Garner group, there were two men who had profiles. Fortunately, these profiles were not with any participants on the proposed program roster and had no impact on my ability to enroll them. Unfortunately, this did not prevent the administration from transferring one of them. Frequently, the reason transfers are made with inmates who have profiles, is so that the administration does not have to continuously monitor inmates with profiles from interacting. It is a lot easier for custody staff when inmates do not have a profile with anyone in the facility.

J. Inmates Can Change Their Religious Affiliation

In Connecticut, an inmate can change religious affiliation every ninety days by simply filling out a Religious Designation Form. The change is administered on the last Monday of the month. The faiths represented in the Connecticut State Correctional system include, Protestant (English), Protestant (Spanish), Catholic, Muslim, Jewish, Native American, and most recently Nation of God's and Earth (NGE0), otherwise known as Five Percent Nation.¹⁴ Under the terms of my commission, I engage in religious discussions and conduct services for inmates who have signed up for Judaism. I may provide worship activities, study, and/or pastoral care to these inmates. In addition, chaplains may discuss religious subject matter with any inmate who approaches them during pastoral tours. However, chaplains may not initiate denominational religious discussions with inmates nor engage inmates of other denominations in denominational worship. If inmates of another faith initiate a conversation with a chaplain, as is frequently the case, the chaplain may engage in that conversation. However, when the inmate

¹⁴ Five-Percent Nation. The Five-Percent Nation, sometimes referred to as NGE or NOGE, the Nation of Gods and Earths, or the Five Percenters, is a movement founded in 1964 in the Harlem section of the borough of Manhattan, New York City, by a former member of the Nation of Islam (NOI), Clarence 13X, who was named Clarence Edward Smith.

dismisses the chaplain, the chaplain may not persist with the conversation and must always respect the boundaries of the inmate.

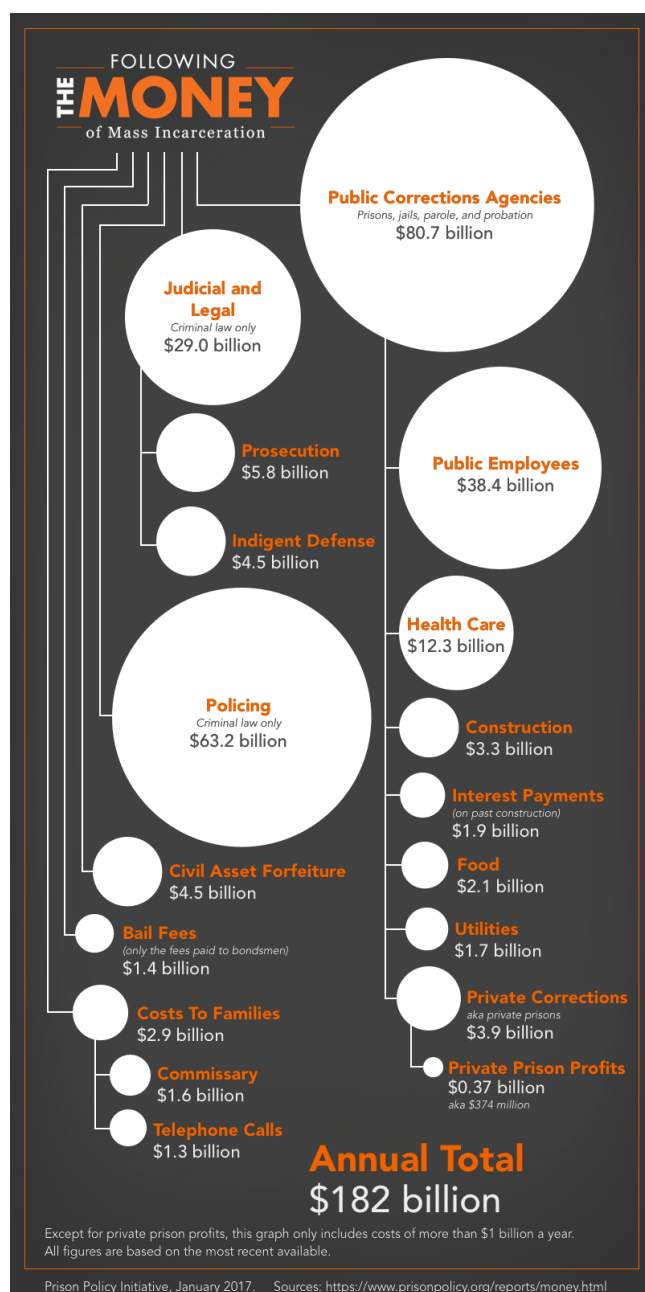
K. Hyper-Incarceration

Concerning public policy and the general state of hyper-incarceration in the United States, it is important to consider that, as of 2017, prisons, jails, juvenile justice programs, parole, salaries and the rest of the line items associated with the American penal system make up at least 182 Billion dollars of our national budget.¹⁵ Since the war on drugs in the 1980s, the budgets for the Department of Correction have grown exponentially. While the sociological causes of this phenomenon are beyond the scope of this report, I offer this brief sketch of some of the key drivers of incarceration and key issues of reform. This will help elucidate the current marketplace need for a program like *Gates of Understanding*. I believe *Gates of Understanding* has the potential to be a prison program for many correctional facilities throughout the country, which is why I have tasked myself with writing the Facilitator's Manual found in Chapter Five, "How Can Others Facilitate the Project."

L. Prison Reform

Prison reforms seeking to lower the incarcerated population are already taking place in the United States on both the federal and state levels. In August 2013, U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder announced that low-level, nonviolent drug offenders with no ties to large-scale organizations, gangs, or cartels will no longer receive "draconian mandatory minimum sentences." Reform is also occurring here in Connecticut, and there has been some shrinkage in the inmate population over these past two years. Enfield Correctional Institute has closed and so has the Annex at Niantic, and the Madison unit in Bridgeport.

¹⁵Equal Justice Initiative, "Following the Money of Mass Incarceration," January 2017, <https://ejj.org/contact-us> (April 11, 2011).

Figure 4¹⁶

¹⁶ Ibid.

Governor Ned Lamont just appointed a new commissioner for the Connecticut Department of Correction, Rollin Cook, a reformer from Utah. On February 21, 2019 Commissioner Cook announced the closing of some general population housing units in Bridgeport Correctional Center, Maloney Youth Institute in Cheshire and Northern Correctional Institute in Somers. On Friday, December 12, 2018, President Trump signed the First Step Act,¹⁷ a bipartisan criminal justice reform bill aimed at reducing recidivism and reconsidering sentencing laws like three strikes, certain mandatory sentencing and other harsh penalties. The United States Senate approved the Act with a vote of 87 to 12 and the House of Representatives also approved it. The Bill expands in-prison and post-release employment programming and allows for some alternatives to prison for low risk prisoners. It is widely believed that this federal bill, while effecting only federal prisons, will have a strong impact on the state correctional facilities. According to prisonpolicay.org, Approximately 10% of the incarcerated population in the United States is in federal prisons.

The First Step act was preceded by The Justice Reinvestment Initiative of 2006. Currently Fifteen U.S. states are participating in the Justice Reinvestment Initiative, a data-driven program whose goal is decreasing spending on corrections by reducing prison populations and increasing public safety. Proponents of the initiative believe they will ultimately save taxpayers billions of dollars. This Justice Reinvestment is a bipartisan effort across state government to develop a data driven approach to public safety that will reduce spending on corrections and reinvest the savings in ways that prevent recidivism and hold offenders accountable for their actions.¹⁸

¹⁷ Erin McCarthy Holliday, Jurist, Legal News and Research, "President Trump signs criminal justice reform First Step Act into law," December 21, 2018, <https://www.iurist.org/news/2018/12/president-trump-signs-criminal-justice-reform-first-step-act-into-law/>, (Date Accessed, April 11, 2019)

¹⁸ Justice Council of State Governments, "Justice Reinvestment Initiative," 2019, <https://csgjusticecenter.org/jr/> (Date accessed, April 11, 2019).

In recent years it appears that a consensus has been established across the political spectrum in the U.S. that our criminal justice system needs to continue shifting its focus from punishment to rehabilitation, particularly with nonviolent offenders. Interest is growing in the penal systems of countries like Norway, Germany, and the Netherlands whose aim is making prisoners better citizens. This emphasis is proving to be more effective than a focus on punishment. Emphasis on teaching life skills and providing needed mental health treatment, including administering psychotropic drugs, is proving to be effective.¹⁹ This is because the underlying cause of the crimes appears to be tightly linked to substance abuse, mental illness, lack of job skills, learning disabilities and lack of education, housing and employment.²⁰

As of August 2014, Norway's penal system had fewer than 4,000 of the country's 5 million people incarcerated, a per capita rate of 75 per 100,000, compared to 707 people for every 100,000 in the United States during the same period.²¹ Moreover, when Norway's inmates leave prison, they rarely return. Norway, on average, has one of the lowest recidivism rates in the world at 20%, whereas the United States has one of the highest – 76.6% of incarcerated Americans are rearrested within five years of their release.²²

The more successful models found in Norway, Germany and the Netherlands have caught the attention of several leaders in the field. The Vera Institute of Justice, a New York-based nonprofit organization that works with government agencies to improve courts, prisons,

¹⁹ Bowen RA, Rogers, "Medication management and practices in prison for people with mental health problems: a qualitative study," October 20, 2009, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19843341>, (Date accessed, January 2019).

²⁰ Mark T. Berg and Beth M. Huebner, "Reentry and the Ties that Bind," April 2011, <http://www.pacific-gateway.org/reentry,%20employment%20and%20recidivism.pdf>, (Date Accessed, September 2018) Examination of Social Ties, Employment, and Recidivism According to Learning Disabilities Association of American, more than 750,00 adults behind bars report having a disability, with two-thirds experiencing cognitive disability. Sarah Knopf-Amelung, "Incarceration and Homelessness, A Revolving Door of Risk," November 2013, https://www.nhchc.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/infocus_incarceration_nov2013.pdf, (Date Accessed April 8, 2019) According to A Quarterly Research Review of the National HCH Council: Vol. 2, Issue 2 Nov. 2013, researchers generally agree that 25-50% of the homeless population has a history of incarceration.

²¹ Christina Sterbenz, "Why Norway's Prison System is so Successful," December 11, 2014, <https://www.businessinsider.com/why-norways-prison-system-is-so-successful-2014-12>, (Date accessed, April 9, 2019)

²² Durose, Matthew R., Alexia D. Cooper, and Howard N. Snyder, "National Institute of Justice, Recidivism," April 2014, <https://www.nij.gov/topics/corrections/recidivism/pages/welcome.aspx>, (Date Accessed, January, 2019).

and other criminal justice institutions, in recent years has been advising that the United States adopt these more successful models. The Vera Institute and the John Jay College of Criminal Justice have partnered with leading groups of prison officials, prosecutors, researchers and activists from the U.S. to tour German prisons. This included heads of prison systems from New Mexico, Washington, Tennessee and Connecticut, as well as several district attorneys.

Connecticut Governor Dannell P. Malloy and Connecticut Department of Correction Commissioner, Scott Semple.²³ All participants are individuals who have demonstrated keen interest in prison reform and are at the heart of the national movement.

In this spirit, an appropriate role for state and federal government would be to allocate the necessary funds for established evidence-based programs as well as compelling startups. With increased due diligence, the best interdisciplinary practices observed, and all pertinent metadata mined, our improved system of services will eventually provide substantial financial dividends to each state, whereas savings in human lives cannot be quantified. Financial savings can be reinvested in additional wrap-around programs that provide educational and recreational alternatives to gang violence, drug abuse, and hopelessness in America's inner cities. Moreover, with increased funding available cities and towns should be able to provide a greater amount of job skills training, community centers, libraries, mental health counselors, GED counselors, community colleges, and vocational institutes so that we can break the poverty, drug abuse, and crime epidemic in America.

As a prison chaplain constantly receiving excellent up-to-date continuing education on how we can decrease the rate of recidivism and increase ways and means toward achieving our

²³ Scott Semple was Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Correction. Commissioner Semple joined the Connecticut Department of Correction in 1988, as a front-line correction officer at the high security Cheshire Correctional Institution. Featured in a March 31, 2019 "60 minutes" report that Gov. Dannell P. Malloy's and former commissioner Scott Semple along with other national criminal justice leaders joined with the Vera Institute and John Jay College of Criminal Justice in a visit to German prisons.

professional objectives, my views echo the pronouncements of Scott Semple, commissioner of

Connecticut's Department of Corrections:

"Historically, some people refer to it as hyper-incarceration, or mass incarceration. It has been a huge financial burden on state budgets, federal budgets, and county budgets. Connecticut is unique because it's a consolidated system. I have an obligation, and our agency has an obligation, to be responsive to the taxpayers, and that is the direction received from our governor to try to have an impact on this population, in terms of his developing of the Second Chance Act. It's very, very expensive to incarcerate people in Connecticut – not only in Connecticut, but across the nation. And a mere 5 percent reduction in recidivism {In Connecticut}, equates to about \$12 million in savings. That's a substantial amount of money, but if you take it even further, there are other savings within local government and things of that nature, with police and all different types of public safety entities related to mass incarceration, that could be a cost savings; and there is great social impact as well. It's about creating law-abiding citizens and sustainable incomes, but people must feel better about themselves. It's not just to get a job, and that solves the problem. If that was the case, this initiative would be a lot easier to address."

I found further expressions of this nature in a book given to me at a recent chaplain denomination meeting, *The Justice Imperative: How Hyper-Incarceration Has Hijacked the American Dream*, a *Malta Justice Initiative* penned by Brian E. Moran. It is a collaborative examination of Connecticut's Criminal Justice and Corrections System and is the product of a bipartisan coalition of Connecticut businesspeople, correctional professionals, legislators, judges, law enforcement professionals, lawyers, clergy and academics:

"Our criminal justice system needs reform. Such system costs the taxpayers too much, fails at rehabilitation, exacts a lifelong toll on offenders and does not yield corresponding societal benefits ... We believe there are systemic solutions capable of saving money, making us safer, and providing offenders with a pathway toward reformation and reintegration."²⁴

19 Brian E. Moran, "The Justice Imperative: How Hyper-Incarceration Has Hijacked the American Dream, a Malta Justice Initiative," August 8, 2014, <https://www.amazon.com/Justice-Imperative-Hyper-Incarceration-Hijacked-American/dp/0988650975>, (Date Accessed, September 2018)

M. The Good that Prisons Do

There is much untold good that law enforcement and correctional institutions do for inmates and communities that I experience firsthand every day. Drug addicts who would have died of overdoses if they were not found by the police, drug dealers who would have been killed by their rivals had they not been arrested, people in the throes of psychotic episodes who were prevented by law enforcement from hurting themselves and others, are but a few examples of how arrest and incarceration has helped countless citizens.

There are also successful denominational prison ministry programs and secular life-skill programs I have researched during the natural course of my work. Currently, the most popular programs include the Kairos Retreat, The Strawberry Festival, A Purpose Driven Life, and Alternatives to Violence. The Department of Correction is a huge and diverse agency. Therefore, it is important to not lose sight of the good work that is done by many employees in correctional facilities.

N. Spiritual, but Not Religious

According to a 2017 Pew survey,²⁵ on average, nearly a quarter of U.S. adults (23%) consider themselves to be spiritual, but not religious, an 8% increase from five years earlier.²⁶ This trend has increased consistently across gender, ethnic, age, socio-economic and political lines. A 2011 survey conducted in the Oregon state correctional system found that 23% of men and women inmates considered themselves spiritual, but not religious, not a significant difference from the Pew survey that followed it six years later.²⁷ What is also significant for our

²⁵Michael Lipka and Claire Gecewicz, "More Americans Now Say They're Spiritual but Not Religious," September 6, 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/09/06/more-americans-now-say-theyre-spiritual-but-not-religious/>

²⁶ Ibid. According to a 2017 Pew Research finding, on average, 23% of the United States population between the ages of 18 to 65, consider themselves spiritual but not religious. The lowest demographic is 17% among 65 and older, and the highest demographic is 32% among college graduates.

²⁷ Tom P. O'Connor and Jeff B. Duncan, "The Sociology of Humanist, Spiritual, and Religious Practice in Prison: Supporting Responsivity and Distance from Crime," November 2, 2011, <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/2/4/590/htm>, (Date Accessed April September 15, 2018).

purposes, is another category in the Oregon survey that shows that 60% of the men and 68% of the women inmates consider themselves spiritual and religious.

These findings confirm that *Gates of Understanding* is arriving at a time when there is a substantial and increasing demand for spiritual programming. *Gates of Understanding* is unique in that it has finessed both religious and spiritual components in a way that people of all faiths can feel comfortable and excited to participate. For example, as shown in Chapter Four, “The Theology that Drives the Project,” *Gates of Understanding* encourages people of all faiths to be observant of their faith while at the same time establishes a common meeting ground in the spiritual values shared by all faiths. However, these religious observances do not take place in *Gates of Understanding*, they are simply outcomes encouraged by *Gates of Understanding* to be carried out by each participant in their own lives. Moreover, for approximately one quarter of the population who consider themselves spiritual and not religious, *Gates of Understanding* would fulfill a need that is currently only beginning to be met in Connecticut correctional facilities and throughout the country. I say it is beginning in Connecticut because of my work and the work of my colleague Reverend Dr. Michael Christie who has recently introduced programs in mindfulness meditation in some of Connecticut’s correctional facilities to both inmates and staff. Whereas, in Oregon on an institutional level, the role of denominational chaplains has expanded such that they may engage in spiritual and humanistic spheres with all inmates, while also supporting the denominational needs of their parishioners. As mentioned, leaders in corrections made a visit to Germany to learn how they achieved their 20% recidivism rate. However, right here in the state of Oregon, a similar outcome (22%) has been achieved. Further investigation into the Oregon model is a fascinating prospect, but beyond the scope of this paper. I will, however, be investigating that model as I move forward with my interfaith ministry here in Connecticut.

CHAPTER 4

THE THEOLOGY THAT DRIVES THE PROJECT

A. The Omnipresent Within

1. It Happened Before You Were Born

The Talmudic rabbis in tractate Nidda (30b) offer an extraordinary and poignant parable: The Omnipresent teaches every developing embryo in its mother's womb the most profound truths of existence and the great purpose the Omnipresent has for its soul. As soon as the child is born, though, an angel touches its upper lip and all knowledge is banished to the recesses of the infant's mind. A Freudian analysis would maintain that this knowledge, which had been in the conscious mind is now moved to the subconscious mind. However, the impression was already made, and the rest of life is spent remembering these great truths. That is why when a person makes an inner discovery, they experience it more as if they were remembering something that was always there but got covered up----something very important to them emotionally and spiritually.

2. Summoning the Omnipresent

The spirit of the Omnipresent lives in every person in a latent state waiting to be summoned into conscious existence, and the purpose of religion is to awaken the remembrance of the Omnipresent. The Omnipresent is not in some other place; the Omnipresent is here now within every person and in the created world.²⁸

²⁸ Deuteronomy 30:13-15 "And it is not across the sea, as though one must say, 'Who will cross over to the other side of the sea and get it for us and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?' For the thing is very near you—it is in your mouth and in your mind so that you can do it."

3. Religion That Helps People Grow

Religion is regarded as worthy when it awakens parishioner's awareness of the Omnipresent within. This approach places the Omnipresent within people themselves not religious institutions, leaders and dogmas. Religion must perform for the parishioner, not the parishioner for the religion. This distinction has far reaching ramifications that establish the distinct philosophy of *Gates of Understanding*. The emphasis is upon understanding oneself, accepting oneself, boosting self-esteem and, developing the freedom to discover one's spiritual essence. This discovery may be independent of a religious faith entirely or aided by a religious faith, but that path is determined by each person without fear or coercion. True spiritual development occurs when a person claims the freedom to explore the presence of the Omnipresent within oneself and in the world. This kind of engagement with the Omnipresent nurtures, reminds and heals. It does not thwart, obstruct and traumatize.

4. Why This Approach and Not Another?

The purpose of this approach is to create a stark contrast between the ethos of *Gates of Understanding* and certain strident religious dogmas that have traumatized much of human society. Unworthy religions have sowed fear in people's hearts by warning them that if a people do not believe or proclaim in a certain way, they will be doomed to suffering eternal damnation. I view such an approach to religious faith as hostile, rooted in panic and fear. Throughout history, religions have been used as a weapon to control and manipulate society. The threat of eternal damnation presents to the human mind as a predator. It triggers the fight or flight response in the amygdala in the mid-brain. This draws people towards faith as a refuge they run to out of fear of unabating agony. But such an engagement with the Omnipresent does not help people understand themselves or the spiritual reality of their lives. It portrays the Omnipresent as mean and sadistic. It causes people to take flight, seeking refuge in religion as

protection from the worst possible predator—eternal damnation. Moreover, it often motivates parishioners to fight. It is a doctrine created by humans, not God, to scare people into conforming and declaring a specific religious faith. This abuse of faith is effective in winning bodies and financial resources, but sadly, it is not at all effective in advancing the spiritual development of parishioners. It is not effective in reminding a parishioner of the Omnipresent within and our remembrance of our spiritual life and our quiet unrelenting desire to grow and discover more dimensions of life, our phenomenal existence, consciousness and an objective understanding of our place in the universe.

5. The Awakening

What is envisioned for the participants of *Gates of Understanding* is the epiphany that one can discover a new understanding of oneself, life and the world. Parishioners can awaken the Omnipresent within by embodying the desire to merge with one's spiritual nature. Participants can continue moving forward fulfilling more and more of their potential. The Omnipresent is benevolent, kind and loving. There is no eternal damnation, just a process of spiritual evolution. There is karma, divine judgement, growing pains and a need for atonement, but the ultimate destiny of every soul and all of creation, is unification with the goodness of the Omnipresent.²⁹ This mysterious gift of life with which we've been blessed, can be used to gain closeness to that spiritual aspect of our inner life that once taught us every mystery and purpose of our soul as we were being formed in our mother's womb. There is always a still small voice within that is ready to teach us. It only requires our receptivity.

²⁹ Psalm 100:5. For the Omnipresent is good, and the Omnipresent's loving kindness endures forever.

6. *The Gentle Bold Path*

Gates of Understanding is a gentle path. It is a path that leads towards clearer insights that are very liberating and lead towards spiritual pleasure. It's a path that leads to a secure connection with joy that strengthens people and makes them better versions of themselves.

7. *Repairing Past Religious Trauma*

Participants come to Gates of Understanding carrying a measure of trauma and a desire to learn how to live a better life than the life they had been living. They desire to be released from these traumas. The Omnipresent created us so that we may fulfill our greatest potential and find peace. While many have abandoned strident approaches to faith, many were already traumatized by its violent threats. *Gates of Understanding* endeavors to relieve religious trauma and give people permission to think and be themselves without worry of calamity. These worries must be suspended in order to grow. I chose this approach to theology because it is my true belief and it is the path, I observed to be the most effective for human development.

B. Human Relationships Come Before Godly Relationships

1. *Keeping God Waiting*

Judaism places supreme value on humanistic endeavors, and, in fact, an even greater emphasis on human covenantal relationships than creedal relationships. Powerful evidence for such ethos is found in Genesis 18:1-2:

The Lord appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to greet them and bowed before them.³⁰

Abraham is having a prophetic encounter which he abruptly interrupts upon seeing three men to whom he wishes to extend hospitality. Based upon these verses, Rav Judah stated in the

³⁰ Abraham represents Kindness, Isaac Judgement and Jacob a synthesis of both.

name of Rav, in the Babylonian Talmud, “Hospitality is greater than welcoming the divine presence!” The needs of strangers are more important than being in the presence of God!

2. Family and Faith

A powerful closing argument in support of this ethos is found in the Book of Ruth, 1:16-17:

Ruth said: Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me.³¹

The Talmudic sages see in this passage a certain hierarchy of priorities. First and foremost, Ruth is saying to her mother-in-law Naomi: I stand in a strong covenantal relationship with you. Secondly, I will submit to your creedal traditions. The creed exists within the human covenant, not visa-versa.

3. Pray Even If You Don't Believe

Works are greatly valued over beliefs in modern day Judaism. Moreover, attending public prayer services is not only done in fulfillment of a religious obligation, but in fulfillment of the civic obligation that is part of being a good neighbor. A parishioner becomes one of the ten members of a minyan necessary to run a prayer service, and one's participation, therefore, makes it possible for the group to fulfill its communal creedal responsibility even if that parishioner is not earnestly praying.

4. Dark Humor

Perhaps the best way to emphasize the primacy of the human to human relationship in Judaism is through a bit of dark humor. Ten Jews in the Auschwitz concentration camp held a group discussion on the question as to whether God truly exists. It did not take long for the group to

³¹ Naomi is married to a man named Elimelech. A famine causes them to move with their two sons, from their home in Judea to Moab. Near destitute, Naomi returns to Bethlehem with one daughter-in-law, Ruth, whom she could not dissuade from accompanying her. Her other daughter-in-law, Orpah, remains in Moab.

reach a unanimous decision. The logic was simple: Because God did not intervene and save us from Hitler, he couldn't exist. What kind of God would allow such a thing? Suddenly Moshe, the moderator of the group, exclaimed, "Oh my goodness, I must recite Kaddish for my mother, the sun is setting, we've got to start the afternoon prayer! One need not believe in God to enter a prayer service, because Jews attend services not only for God, but for the sake of people."

C. Works Vs. Grace

1. The Doctrine of Works

The doctrine of works is a core teaching of Judaism, is needed in prison populations, and thus is a primary characteristic of this ministry project. Why is it needed? There is a tendency amongst inmates in prison to blame others for their mistakes. We are happy when inmates start adopting pro-social spiritual values, but we must remember that in most cases, their crimes left behind a trail of destruction and misery. Christian grace is important, and is what inmates are usually offered however, when inmates have not fully embraced accountability for the damage they wrought, the direct, down-to-earth, tough-love Jewish approach has something important to bring to the discussion. That is why I have taken this approach and not another approach. It is an approach that is long overdue, and has not yet formally arrived, in the general prison populations in the United States.

2. Wrestling with Grace Vs. Works

This theological dichotomy is not unlike the dichotomy that exists in secular discussions in criminal justice concerning the punishment versus rehabilitation polemic. On the one hand, I do not want my parishioners to see religion as an opportunity to declare spiritual bankruptcy and forgo their debt to society. Yet, on the other hand, the idea of inmates receiving grace and forgiveness from the Omnipresent is wonderful and uplifting. If people do not feel God's love and grace, it is hard for them to begin trying to love themselves and others. Grace is needed to

get the whole spiritual process going. At the end of this section is a delightful resolution to this polemic that I believe will be acceptable to facilitators of any faith.

3. God Doesn't Forgive Sins Between People Until People Forgive People

How can grace come to a person who is still perpetrating horrendous violent crime or has not repented for past crimes? Shouldn't grace and forgiveness be somewhat contingent on repentance? I believe that Christianity has emphasized the concept of grace and forgiveness coming to people even when they don't deserve it, especially in correctional facilities.

Additionally, while greater emphasis is placed on works in Judaism, these characteristics have not been static. For the purposes of this discussion, "works" and "social responsibility" are synonymous just as "grace" and "forgiveness" are synonymous. This tug of war between works and grace is relevant to my project because my participants have committed murder; robbed banks, homes, and individuals; sold drugs; endangered children; physically assaulted people; stolen people's identities; and ruined many lives. Without repentance and remorse, there are no works and without works there is no forgiveness. These are things that need to occur to bring about rehabilitation, reconciliation and reintegration in the community.

4. Grace is needed for encouragement

Of course, we want inmates to be encouraged by the promise that they can rise to lofty spiritual heights and be recipients of divine grace. However, the first step of their rehabilitation should include a sense of remorse and a willingness to perform acts of restorative justice. I worry that by sending inmates messages of grace and loving kindness without a call to social justice, the message received could be that they can be forgiven without repentance and remorse.

5. Atoning for Murder

In Talmudic Law, if one committed murdered, they must save five lives in order to atone for their sin. If you have robbed, they are obligated to pay back twice the value. One must be prepared to repair the damage and pay for the suffering and humiliation they've caused.³² While this source applies only to torts to property and persons, and does not deal with murder, I have taken a novel approach in directing inmates guilty of murder, to save five souls to atone for their sin. I say, "you've stolen a soul and now you must repay that debt by saving five souls." I am interpreting Judaism for the 21st century and outlining a path towards atonement for those guilty of murder. I remind them that Moses murdered an Egyptian taskmaster and went on to become the great lawgiver in Israel.

6. Resolution

On the theological side, works and grace are not at odds---- it is about balance. The more a facilitator preaches the doctrine of works, the more grace and love must accompany that message for it to be received. On the criminal justice side, punishment and rehabilitation are not the only justification for incarceration. There is a third and more compelling reason—the obligation of the state to protect society-----public safety. Criminal justice is not primarily for the criminal, the micro component, it is primarily for society, the macro component. This perspective is asking only one question, which form of criminal justice is most effective in protecting public safety?

7. Rehabilitations Makes Society Safer

Since punishment alone is not going to inspire inmates to be kinder and more compassionate, it is the weakest rationale for incarceration. Recipients of harsh judgement, except for those incarcerated for life without parole, will eventually be released back into the

³² Babylonian Talmudic Law, Baba Kama 83b

community. If such returning citizens are made to feel that they are unworthy of grace and loving kindness, they will be pushed into the only world that welcomes them—the world of crime. Looking at criminal justice through the lens of public safety, the punishment model fails because it makes no effort to rehabilitate, and when criminals are not rehabilitated, society is in greater danger. Public safety must embrace and espouse the form of criminal justice that is most efficacious in protecting society.

8. Forgiveness is a Prerequisite for Rehabilitation

Similarly, prison ministry that emphasizes grace and forgiveness and does not place enough emphasis on repentance and restorative justice, fails at bringing about rehabilitation. Rehabilitation must be preceded by remorse and repentance. And when remorse and repentance occur, restorative actions follow, and true rehabilitation takes root. The model offered by *Gates of Understanding* has a sophisticated blend of repentance and forgiveness that I believe will be very efficacious in rehabilitating criminals. And while the prospect of tracking rehabilitation is beyond the scope of this project, it informs and directs its ministry goals.

9. Judaism Helps Keep Things Balanced

In conclusion, when prison ministry combines loving kindness with social responsibility, the results are more spiritually and emotionally evolved parishioners and a safer society. That is why I have taken this approach and not another approach. Prison ministry is driven today primarily by an abundance of grace and forgiveness and needs to be supplemented with repentance and social responsibility. Grace and forgiveness do not only exist and make demands in the spiritual realm; but also exist and makes demands in the social realms. Judaism brings to the table a social element that I believe will continue making an important impact upon the criminal justice system. It is time for the Jewish idea to come out from the shadows and shine in correctional facilities throughout the land.

D. Taking Responsibility for Justice and Restitution

1. Faith Tests

Most forms of Christianity and Islam are inclined to require adherents to declare, “I accept Jesus as my Lord and savior” or “There is No God but Allah and Muhammad is his Messenger,” Judaism does not have a faith test and is more concerned about what people do rather than what they believe. Hillel’s³³ edict, “If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I. And if not now, when?” is likely the most quoted Mishnaic³⁴ expression and most emblematic of works.³⁵

2. Statue of Responsibility

Viktor Frankl is considered in academic circles to have established a third Viennese school of psychotherapy, following Freud and Adler. Frankl offers a spiritual component which he calls Logo Therapy. Logo Therapy often begins with basic concerns such as directing patients towards knowing themselves and finding meaning through creative contributions to society, whereas Freud and Adler focused on physical pleasure and social status respectively. Frankl is more interested in the future than Freud and Adler, who tend to focus more on the powerful effects of early childhood experiences. Frankl is more interested in getting his patients in touch with knowing themselves and their purpose in the world. A person’s talents are God’s command. Buddhists call it fulfilling one’s Dharma. It means doing what one was put in this world to do. Moreover, Frankl maintains that a person has the responsibility to fulfill their

³³ Hillel was the foremost teacher in Palestine in the first century BCE. Together with Shammai, Hillel is mentioned in the first chapter of *Ethics of the Fathers (Pirkei Avot)* as the last of the ‘Pairs’, the five sets of two spiritual heads in succession until the leadership of the people was in the hands of Hillel’s descendants, of the house of Rabban Gamaliel. Several Hillel’s descendants were also named Hillel, of whom the best-known is the fourth-century Hillel to whom is attributed the fixing of the calendar.

³⁴ Mishna, Mishnaic expression; an authoritative collection of exegetical material embodying the oral tradition of Jewish law and forming the first part of the Talmud.

³⁵ According to the *Iggeret of Rav Sherira* Gaon, Hillel was born in Babylon and descended from the tribe of Benjamin on his father’s side and the family of King David on his mother’s side. Hillel emigrated to Israel at age 40 to learn from the Talmudic sages and lived in Jerusalem during the time of King Herod and the Roman emperor Augustus.

destiny and therein is found the meaning of a person's life. Frankl said, "Freedom is only part of the story and half of the truth. The positive aspect of freedom is responsibility. That is why I recommend that the Statue of Liberty on the East Coast be supplemented by a Statue of Responsibility on the West Coast."³⁶ Frankl emphasized a person finding personal meaning through actions in the world.

E. Spirituality is the Answer

1. Spirituality is Therapeutic

My experience tells me that spiritual therapy administered in high doses can transform a person who has an intrinsic motivation to learn and improve his or her life. I am not saying that other programs would not work. On the contrary, I would hope that there are multiple programs that can help incarcerated populations grow. The practical and tangible results I achieved with participants included adopting spiritual practices, feeling happier, and behaving in a more open pro-social manner. Anecdotally, there have been numerous times in my life when I have seen spirituality turn people's lives around positively and permanently. I confide that this was a transformation I personally experienced in my early 20's in Israel when I spent a decade studying in Jerusalem Yeshivot.³⁷ And while this project is not an empirical sociological study, it is evidence-based ministry, and I will attempt to pursue it with the reflective qualities of a sociologist. These reflections will help to continue refining *Gates of Understanding* well beyond the time of this doctoral study.

³⁶ Alex Pattakos, "Revisiting the Meaning of the Statue of Responsibility," January 4, 2013, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/revisiting-the-meaning-of_b_2069735, (Access dates, September, 3, 2018)

The original idea of a "Statue of Responsibility" was the vision of Viktor Frankl, a holocaust survivor who went on to publish the best-seller "Man's Search for Meaning," which today is among the top 10 most influential books on the planet. In this work published in 1946, he expresses his dream in the quote above.

³⁷ A Yeshiva is a traditional Jewish Seminary of higher learning. I learned in these Yeshivot: <https://diasporayeshiva.weebly.com/about-us.html>, <https://ohr.edu/new/>, <http://www.torahore.org/staff>, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mir_Yeshiva_\(Jerusalem\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mir_Yeshiva_(Jerusalem)), <https://www.aish.com/>,

2. Ministry Goal vs. Project Goal

A successful return to society for all inmates is an overarching goal of my ministry, however it is beyond the scope of this doctoral project. It is important to note, however, that a successful return to society is not my only ministry goal. Many parishioners will serve out their life sentences in the prison village. Prison is their home wherein they can learn to live relatively happy lives. And while the overarching ministry goal is successful return for those able to do so, the scope of the project is more immediate. The focus is improving the quality of spiritual and practical daily life of vetted inmate populations of any faith. This could be accomplished with a person serving a life sentence or with a person serving a short sentence. My belief is that the core skills and spiritual practices taught through *Gates of Understanding*, will over time, prove to be an important support for successful reentry to society.

3. The Omnipresent is Present on Both Sides of the Walls

No matter where participants make their homes, *Gates of Understanding* seeks to inculcate the awareness that the spirit of God lives within them. It is in their power to summon God into their consciousness through study, prayer, meditation, acts of loving kindness, physical exercise and nutrition. The Garden of Eden is not located in some far-off time and place. The Garden, and so many other sacred logos, are parables and spiritual portals that exist within oneself. Reaching God requires one to first reach the core of one's own soul; and it is there one finds God patiently waiting. We teach that God is found in the still small voice within.³⁸

4. Dynamic Breath Meditation

A person can overcome their reactive nature in stressful moments by taking a deep slow breath and letting it out slowly. When this occurs, the impulse to react to everything is

³⁸ 1 Kings 19:11-12 "... but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake there was fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a still small voice..." [And that is where the Lord was.]

greatly diminished. It enables one to focus on what is occurring and increases their understanding of every situation. By maintaining the thought that within oneself is a still small voice of God---a whisper, a soothing vibration, can have a powerful impact on behavior and inner satisfaction. Listening and connecting with this inner source of the Omnipresent requires a person to shut down a lot of chatter. Dedicating oneself to this and similar practices is a labor of the heart requiring personal involvement. Medication, when appropriately prescribed by a physician, helps as well. When community, meditation and medication come together in a coordinated effort, the best results occur. "...a cord of three strands is not quickly broken." (Ecclesiastes 4:12)

5. Rational Spirituality vs. Spiritual Revelation

To navigate our way to the still small voice, there are actual neural pathways that need to be forged and/or uncovered; pathways crucial for achieving true self-knowledge and self-sufficiency. This ethos is based more on rational inquiry than an encounter with revelation. The fountain of wisdom is not emanating from on high, but from within. The neural pathways that the program seeks to open are what is intended by the name *Gates of Understanding*. Certainly, inspiration is encouraged, but learning is sacrosanct.

6. Self-sufficiency

The goal is building spiritual self-sufficiency in participants. This requires a working knowledge of how one can navigate their way to the still small voice within. A rational method such as long breath meditation, study, prayer, acts of loving kindness, exercise and nutrition, is needed. Whereas, when speaking of revelation, it is often brought to parishioners in inspirational sermons by clergy. Through their well-crafted spiritual message, they succeed in lifting participants to higher spiritual thoughts and emotions. The concern though, is what

happens to participants after the inspiration has dissipated? Often participants do not know how to retain their spiritual state. They need their own rational method of retaining and returning to the spiritual insights that inspirational orators inspired within them.

7. Spiritual Krav Maga as a Concept

I am concerned about how well my inmate parishioners will function when I am not there to inspire them. Only after I have succeeded in getting them to adopt spiritual practices will I believe that they have a chance at lasting happiness and inner peace.

It is not enough to be saved and inspired in the best of times, one must be able to be saved and inspired in the worst of times. A chain is only as strong as its weakest link. Students must learn spiritual Krav Maga for times they are under spiritual attack. What is Krav Maga? It is an Israeli form of hand to hand combat and is known for its focus on real-world situations and its extreme efficiency. It was derived from street fighting experience of Hungarian-Israeli martial artist Imi Lichtenfeld who made use of his training as a boxer and wrestler while defending the Jewish quarter against fascist groups in Bratislava, Czechoslovakia in the mid to late 1930's.³⁹

8. Using the Right Tools

If an inmate parishioner has been in and out of prison many times and has tried to reform their ways many times, it means that the tools they employed to conquer the criminal or addictive behavior were not strong enough, or they have no desire to change. I compare it to a wall that one is attempting to knock down with a tiny sculptor's hammer, when what is really needed is a sledge hammer.

9. Ending the Fight Quickly

³⁹ After the holocaust, Imi Lichtenfeld immigrated to Israel and trained soldiers for combat. These efforts played an important role in the formation of the Israeli Defense force (IDF).

We can understand the foundational principles of Krav Maga and apply them to Spiritual Krav Maga. As with most martial arts, Krav Maga encourages students to avoid physical confrontation. However, if this is impossible or unsafe, it promotes finishing a fight as quickly and aggressively as possible. Attacks are aimed at the most vulnerable parts of the body, and training is not limited to techniques that avoid severe injury; some even permanently injure or cause death to the opponent. Students learn to defend against all varieties of attack and are taught to counter in the quickest and most efficient way. Krav Maga is a form of martial art that is heavy on the martial and light on the arts. It is a scientific approach to combat that utilizes every option to stay alive. It is unconventional, and it is not graceful or pretty, but increases the chances of survival exponentially. It is a training that teaches a student to overcome the fear response and confidently take control of the situation.

10. Spiritual Krav Maga Applied for Success

We can apply these principles to overcoming drug addiction. When, for example, a recovering drug addict is being triggered to use, he or she will bring to that challenge a special training involving tactical steps they can take to weaken the triggers and strengthen their executive functioning. The training is a simulated drill that habituates the patient to these efficacious practices. These practices are the equivalent training in the emotional-spiritual sphere as Krav Maga is in the physical sphere.

11. Calling into Central Control

If a helpline for recovering drug addicts is unreachable for any reason and he or she cannot walk into a health clinic at the precise moment the trigger occurs, what is the caller to do? Here are some tactical moves one can take: (1) Call an Uber or some professional taxi service to go to a walk-in clinic or hospital emergency room. In some cases, calling an ambulance would be in order. (2) Drop to one's knees literally or figuratively, in prayer or meditation. (3)

Read a special affirmation the addict has already written that they always carry with them. The content of the writing helps recovering addicts recall the negative consequences of a drug relapse juxtaposed with the benefits one has been enjoying in sobriety. The writing of these affirmations is a class homework assignment. (4) Read spiritual literature specifically written to redirect one to their higher spiritual nature.

Years of sobriety can be interrupted by one weak moment. Relapse often occurs after an illness or a death of a family member or close friend, or some other stressful event such as divorce or lose of a job. These disturbances tend to overwhelm the individual and create an acute need for some form of relief.

12. Prayer is a Fortress of Strength

When one turns to prayer or meditation, we discussed placing oneself inside an imaginary circle which one vows not to move from until the spirit of insanity passes. When one drops to their knees, they entreat the Omnipresent, "God Almighty, please help me overcome!" Another approach is simply sitting quietly practicing long breath meditation. During the meditation the patient can concentrate on the phrase, "this too shall pass." Patients make up their own thought or spoken mantras. Some included, "I love my life and I will solve this in a better way."

13. Practice Staying on the Wagon

When one gets into the habit of taking any one of these actions before an actual trigger occurs, he or she will be more likely to turn to the technique at the time of battle. The training elevates the odds of surviving a major trigger incident. The trigger occurs for a brief interval of time and the tactical moves are designed to immediately cause the trigger to cease and desist. The simulated drills are designed to build up a habit and a sense of muscle memory. If one loses

the battle, there is a plan for that too; he or she should immediately check themselves into the hospital and not lose the war.

F. Spiritual Self-Sufficiency

1. Intercessors

It is a wonderful thing when parishioners find inspiration in Jesus or Buddha or Krishna or any intercessor or savior associated with their respective faiths. It is my observation, however, that such inspiration and saving does not usually sufficiently inspire and save my beloved parishioners during times of temptation and weakness. It is always easy to do the right thing when one is feeling good; the question is, can one do the right thing when feeling bad or triggered. I have witnessed great sermons by spiritual leaders of a variety of faiths that inspired the people in the sanctuary to go out into the world to spread loving kindness. But the moment somebody cuts them off on the road, or says a disparaging word, out goes the Holy Spirit, out goes love, and out goes compassion. How do we make loving kindness intrinsic to a human being and not just a feeling that comes and goes? How do we lead participants towards spiritual self-sufficiency?

2. Opening Gates and Neural Pathways

This program is called *Gates of Understanding* because it is about a person acquiring within their own consciousness tenets of understanding that open up the gates of loving kindness and holiness. There are neural pathways that need to be constructed in the brain that provide an inner moral compass, not just the morality that awakens when a skilled charismatic speaker leads someone to it. *Gates of Understanding* is all about spiritual self-sufficiency and accepting a life-long journey of self-development.

3. *Drugs are the Main Driver of Incarceration*

A 2018 study conducted by the Federal Bureau of Prisons, shows that 46.1% of inmates nationally are incarcerated for drug offenses, but this does not even begin to measure the impact of drugs on other types of crimes.⁴⁰

As such, a big part of improving the lives of inmates is tied up with recovery and rehabilitation. There are many rehabilitation programs that can help recovering addicts so long as they are willing to help themselves. *Gates of Understanding* brings to correctional facilities a full spectrum of leading ideas about drug addiction that include social and chemical remedies as well as some original spiritual novel ideas discussed herein.

4. *A Drug Addict is a Nazarite*

Gates of Understanding offers a special education to those who suffer with drug addiction that is empowering and never chastising. It identifies the unique profile of the addict with a special kind of holy and respected person called a Nazarite in ancient biblical society. A Nazarite is a person who takes a vow to never partake of wine.⁴¹ We learn something from the Nazarite that helps us better understand today's addicts in a much more respectful light.

There is a certain profile of people who cannot drink or consume drugs in moderation and therefore must never drink alcohol in any measure.⁴² The Nazarite must learn to find his or her gladness of heart through a direct encounter with the Omnipresent. The Nazarite has a ferocious thirst for attaining intoxication, but prior to their vow, pursued it from the vine rather than the Divine. The act of making a vow before the Omnipresent was a way the ancient drug-

⁴⁰ Federal Bureau of Prisons, "Offenses," April 6, 2019, https://www.bop.gov/about/statistics/statistics_inmate_offenses.jsp
Pursuant to Pub. L. No. 71-218, 46 Stat. 325 (1930), the Bureau of Prisons was established within the Department of Justice and charged with the "management and regulation of all Federal penal and correctional institutions."

⁴¹ Jewish Virtual Library, "Nazarite," 2019, (Date of access, May 3, 2019) <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/nazirite>

⁴² Anshe Chesed Fairmont Temple, "Addiction and the Nazirite: A Message for 5778 from Rabbi Andi Berlin," October 18, 2017, (Date of access, May 3, 2019) <https://www.fairmounttemple.org/2017/10/addiction-and-the-nazirite-a-message-for-5778-from-rabbi-andi-berlin/>

addicted person attempted to reclaim the command centers of the brain. The addict could not do this without taking an extraordinary step such as the Nazarite vow. The vow had maximum consequences and accountability. The petitioner had to maintain a unique esthetic lifestyle surrounded with God-intoxicating activities: study, prayer, meditation, acts of loving kindness, exercise and nutrition. We learn from this that in biblical times, intoxication was not considered the problem. The problem was the way intoxication was acquired and who was acquiring it.

5. It is Not Good for Humanity to be Alone

Rat Park is an important experiment done by psychology professor emeritus, Dr. Bruce Alexander, of Simon Fraser University of Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.⁴³ Professor Alexander has taught and conducted research on the psychology of addiction at Simon Fraser University since 1970. He wrote two books expounding on the socio-political ramifications of his findings, *Peaceful Measures: Canada's Way Out of the War on Drugs*⁴⁴ and *The Globalization of Addiction: A Study in Poverty of the Spirit*.⁴⁵

From my observations of individuals who have achieved long lasting recovery, the social solution at the heart of the Rat Park experiment proves to be efficacious. By sharing this approach with students in *Gates of Understanding*, I am not negating other approaches that take into consideration chemical solutions including the methadone programs offered in Connecticut correctional facilities and the prescribing of psychotropic medications. The social-spiritual solutions offered herein present additional recovery tools that are complimentary to chemical-based solutions.

⁴³ Alexander, Bruce K. "Addiction: The View from Rat Park." 2010 <http://www.brucealexander.com/articles-speeches/rat-park/148-addiction-the-view-from-rat-park>

⁴⁴ Bruce K. Alexander (born 20 December 1939) is a psychologist and professor emeritus from Vancouver, BC, Canada. He has taught and conducted research on the psychology of addiction at Simon Fraser University since 1970. He retired from active teaching in 2005. Alexander and SFU colleagues conducted a series of experiments into drug addiction known as the Rat Park experiments.

⁴⁵ He has written two books: *Peaceful Measures: Canada's Way Out of the War on Drugs* (1990) and *The Globalization of Addiction: A Study in Poverty of the Spirit* (2008).

The conventional view of drug addiction is that it is caused primarily by strong chemical bonds in the human physiology. Dr. Alexander, however, suggests that addiction is primarily a symptom of human isolation and can be best remedied by resocialization. It follows then that the opposite of addiction is human connection. Dr. Alexander argues (and many addicts with whom I have conversed agree) that drug addiction is a loner's game and interacting with drugs replaces interacting with people.

6. The Experiment

Dr. Alexander conducted an experiment which involved placing a rat in a small cage by itself. Minimal provisions including two water bottles, one containing plain water and the other containing cocaine-laced water were also placed in the cage. The poor isolated rat kept drinking the cocaine water until he or she died. That is a sad story. However, there is a happier story to tell. In a second experiment, a rat is placed in a state-of-the-art cage, with many attractions such as slides and tunnels, and is joined with several other rats including members of the opposite sex, and the same water options are made available, these rats living in "Rat Park" drink very little of the cocaine water and drink the plain water. None of the rats die of drug overdose. The conclusion is that the cocaine water in the first scenario substituted for a social life. Moreover, the rats who were moved from the first cage to the Rat Park, recovered from their drug addiction.

7. Drugs Attempt to Replace Real Life

Patients in hospitals who undergo major surgeries are usually given a drug called diamorphine for pain; diamorphine is the medical name for heroin. And it is the purest most potent form of the drug. Many patients are on it for enough time to become chemically addicted. But an astonishing thing happens; hardly any of these patients attempt to acquire more of this drug after their release from the hospital. The reason is because they return to their family life, their

job, their hobbies and so forth.⁴⁶ According to the Rat Park experiments, addiction is primarily caused by isolation, not chemical factors.

The Rat Park findings are very encouraging, but also present new problems. Renewed social life is to a recovering drug addict's brain as an insulin injection is to a diabetic's pancreas. The difference between the brain and the pancreas is that the pancreas doesn't say to the diabetic, "Ah, go ahead and skip your insulin shot today." Whereas the recovering drug addict's brain does from time to time say, "Ah, you can skip your NA [Narcotics Anonymous]⁴⁷ meeting today: you've been good for so long; you deserve a little time to relax by yourself." "Relax by yourself," means "start using again." The drug addict has a tricky brain to contend with. The pancreas is not so tricky. It becomes a struggle to maintain control of the command center in the cerebral cortex and not be led astray by impulsive drives emanating from the amygdala and central brain region ruling over various pleasure drives.

Based upon what we now know, the best path forward for the recovering drug addict is to establish a social life and strengthen his or her emotional-spiritual life so that executive functioning is not so easily arrested by transitory, weak, and helpless feelings. Concurrent with this social and spiritual aspect, an addict should be seen by a psychiatrist to evaluate if psychotropic medications would help address any number of psychiatric conditions. Many drug addicts have legitimate psychiatric pathologies such as bipolar disorder, mood disorders, depression and anxiety which they sought to self-medicate with limited success, using street drugs.

⁴⁶Dr. Bruce Alexander wrote on his website, brucealexander.com, "Global society is drowning in addiction to drug use and a thousand other habits. This is because people around the world, rich and poor alike, are being torn from the close ties to family, culture, and traditional spirituality that constituted the normal fabric of life in pre-modern times."

⁴⁷ Narcotics Anonymous, "Welcome to www.NA.org", 2019, (Date of Access, May 3, 2019) <https://www.na.org/>

8. An Epidemic Requires Many Forms of Therapy

Drug addiction has reached epidemic proportions in the United States and nobody has yet implemented a clear and efficacious remedy. It is necessary to keep an open mind to some of the leading approaches. My belief is that the most efficacious approach in combatting drug addiction is through a combination of social, spiritual and medical solutions, and that is why it is the approach I facilitate in this ministry project. The dynamic classroom activities in *Gates of Understanding* offer additional tools and training.

G. Spiritual Guide for the Incarcerated

1. Universal Jewish Wisdom

The Spiritual Guide for the Incarcerated is a unique book because it is the only universal spiritual self-help book inspired by Judaism and written specifically for incarcerated populations. Moreover, aside for a few Jewish volunteers that serve a few times a year, I have not encountered any physical presence in Connecticut prison system of any Jewish institutions like Christian volunteer organizations. There is The Aleph Institute,⁴⁸ but my observation of their activities in Connecticut facilities, show primarily an external interaction with inmates. This past winter of 2018 however, we did place Four Aleph volunteers in our Hanukah lighting program throughout the state. I cannot speak definitively to the nature of their activities in other states, but in Connecticut, they are primarily focused on providing religious literature, prayer books, Torah volumes and calendars, via U.S. mail, to Jewish-born inmates who request them. They have a catalogue they send with their literature.⁴⁹ They advocate to elected officials for

⁴⁸ The Aleph Institute is a national, not-for-profit 501 (c) (3) publicly- supported charitable institution founded by Rabbi Sholom D. Lipskar of the Chabad movement. <https://aleph-institute.org/wp/>

⁴⁹ Chabad.org, "Subscribe to Chabad.org," 2019, (Date accessed, May 1, 2019), https://www.chabad.org/tools/subscribe/default_cdo/jewish/Subscribe

increasing religious rights for Jewish inmates. As such, *Gates of Understanding* and the Spiritual Guide for the Incarcerated with its Facilitator's Manual filled an important need inside prisons.

2. The Spiritual Guide is the Curriculum

Spiritual Guide for the Incarcerated is the title of the manuscript I wrote in support of the project *Gates of Understanding*. It serves as the core curriculum. It is written in the first person. Comforting statements are consistently used throughout, such as “my dear friend, in this sanctuary you are not a prisoner, you are royalty of the Omnipresent.” It is written in a personal way because inmates are constantly dealt with in a formal, impersonal manner. The personal touch provides an important respite that is greatly welcomed by inmate populations. I used this manuscript in this ministry project after I already tested out several of its chapters in prisons and jails for two and a half years prior to beginning *Gates of Understanding*. This enabled me to feel confident that the curriculum would resonate, and it did.

3. An Epistle to Incarcerated Populations

The Guide is written as an epistle from a chaplain to his parishioners. It reflects spiritual treasures found in all faiths and encourages each participant to be true to his or her own faith. Christians are encouraged to be the best Christians they can be, Muslims the best Muslims they can be and so forth. This approach is also necessary for administrative reasons. If I promoted a religious denominational dogma, I would not be able to offer the program through the auspices of educational programming, and if I were to offer it through the auspices of religion programming, I would not have enough vetted students enrolled. (On average, there are only eight Jews at York, and 15 at Garner.)

H. Theology of Universal Spirituality

1. *Extracting the Fruit, Discarding the Shell*

Most of the *Gates of Understanding* curriculum is based on the Torah, Talmud, and Kabbalah, but the material is mined for its universal value rather than creedal content. For example, Passover is referenced not for teaching students how to lead a Seder, but to speak about the importance of family; Ramadan is referenced not to talk about accepting Muhammad as the last prophet, but as a lesson in controlling base appetites, deferring pleasure, controlling impulses and devoting oneself to spiritual thoughts; and the resurrection of Jesus is cited to explore the question: are we just a pack of neurons or do we have a soul? I turn for support to Psychiatrist Carl Jung who in his clinical practice found that the religious spiritual faith of his patients played a positive role in their recovery. Jung believed that religion was a natural expression of the collective unconscious whilst Freud believed it was a collective neurosis. Jung thought that religiousness was a way of aiding the process of individuation: the exploration of ourselves and the final acceptance of who we are.

While *Gates of Understanding* draws heavily from Jewish texts, it also references other sacred sources that speak for the common cause of human self-development. It does not teach religious practices; rather, it teaches universal wisdom, ethics and spirituality. It engages participants in rigorous mental and emotional training in a safe environment where participants are accorded a high degree of respect and yoked with a high degree of responsibility.

2. *Universal Spiritual Practices*

Gates of Understanding is razor-focused on individuals adopting spiritual practices, gaining deeper understandings of themselves and clarity of vision concerning the meaning of their lives and relationships. There are frank discussions and dynamic group interactive activities that are articulated in Chapter Five, “How Can Others Facilitate the Program?” *Gates of*

Understanding was proposed and accepted as an appropriate program for incarcerated people of all faiths in the Connecticut Department of Correction. It is for people who are interested in developing their character traits, life skills and emotional tenacity.

I. Spirituality of Self-Image

1. Who Do You Think You Are?

Focusing upon the acquisition of a spiritual identity is a key component in *Gates of Understanding*. In general, religious programs begin by accepting a obedience and devotion to those religious beliefs and practices. Pronouncements, prayers, declarations, supplications and a set of ritual worship practices are a means of solidifying one's place in the religious group.

Gates of Understanding is quite different. The starting point is understanding oneself, and one's innate purpose in life, as prerequisite to serving any belief, religion, or institution. God's spirit resides in every person, and that is the first place one meets God—within oneself.

2. Transforming Who You Think You Are?

Another thread that strengthens the inmate parishioner's connection with sobriety and crime free living is establishing a spiritual self-image. I learned the concept of identity transformation, as a powerful tool for character transformation, from Rabbi Yisroel Ben Eliezer, born in 1700 and known to Jews as the Baal Shem Tov,⁵⁰ Master of the Good Name; a Jewish mystic acclaimed as the founder of the modern Hasidic movement.

Tradition has it that in the Baal Shem Tov's day, there was an anti-Semitic decree in Poland that required all Jewish men to wear a fur tail on their heads on the Sabbath and

⁵⁰ Yitzhak Buxbaum, *The Light and Fire of the Baal Shem Tov*, p.409, New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006. Israel ben Eliezer (born circa 1698, died 22 May 1760), known as the Baal Shem Tov (Hebrew: בעל שם טוב, /bə:ɫ 'ʃɛm tɔv, tɔf/) or as the Besht, was a Jewish mystical rabbi from Poland, who is regarded as the founder of Hasidic Judaism. "Besht" is the acronym for Baal Shem Tov, which means "Master of the Good Name" or "one with a good reputation"

holidays.⁵¹ The demand was an attempt to humiliate the Jews. The Rabbis were worried that if they did not comply with the Polish authorities they could be visited with harsh pogroms. One day a Polish prince came through the Baal Shem Tov's village in the Carpathian Mountains wearing a magnificent hat, the brim of which was surrounded with a ring of fur tails. The Baal Shem Tov saw the prince adorned with the fur hat, and it appeared on the prince's head as a valiant crown. And so, it came to be the practice amongst Polish Jewish males to wear what is today known as a *streimal*. The Baal Shem Tov taught his followers that the *streimal* is the crown of the Polish princes, and every Shabbat and Yom Tov (major holidays) they are to wear this crown in honor of the holy day and in recognition of their regal spiritual identity.

3. Helping Others Transform Identity

While I am unable to provide my incarcerated parishioners a *streimal*, I can work with the concept of identity transformation in other more relevant ways. Like the Baal Shem Tov's parishioners, who lived in challenging circumstances designed to denigrate them, so are my parishioners denigrated. They are never called by their first name, often shouted at, told when they can move, go to the bathroom, eat, sleep, talk on the phone, or visit family members. External social conditioning has a powerful way of influencing the way people feel about themselves. To succeed in transforming my parishioners and opening *Gates of Understanding* within them, they must be convinced that they are truly princes and princesses of the Omnipresent.

In the first chapter of *Gates of Understanding* titled, "You are a Prince of God", we explore that identity and what it implies. The yoke that it places upon the bearer of that name; the universal quality of that name—One who strives and overcomes. What are the things that

⁵¹Yehuda Shurpin, chabad.org, "Why do Chassidim Wear Streimals (Fur Hats)," https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3755339/jewish/Why-Do-Many-Chassidim-Wear-Shtreimels-Fur-Hats.htm, (Date of Access, January 2018)

cause one to forget that name and to act in accordance with low self-esteem? The way we think of ourselves is the way we generally appear to others. This concept of self-image and social status is further supported by an astonishing verse: "And there we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anakin Giants) and we saw ourselves small as grasshoppers before them, and so they saw us like that as well."⁵² James Allen elaborated on this concept in the early 1900's with his famous words that are the title of his essay, "As a Man Thinketh in His Heart so Shall He Be."⁵³ James wrote, "Man is made or unmade by himself; in the armory of thought he forges the weapons by which he destroys himself. He also fashions the tools with which he builds for himself heavenly mansions of joy and strength and peace."⁵⁴

4. *What Do We Do After We Fail?*

If we have fallen away from our regal identity, what spiritual techniques can we use to quickly regain it? What are the pitfalls that steer us away from our newly acquired identity? All these questions are explored through breakout sessions with the students. Through role playing and simulated drills, we demonstrate and process the nature of a spiritual identity. We can also see the challenges involved in safeguarding that identity.

J. **Spiritual Motivation for This Project**

1. *A Social Experiment*

In many ways, *Gates of Understanding* is the experiment I have always wanted to conduct. I wanted to show that spirituality is not an empty or vain endeavor, but, if presented coherently, and in ample measure, could be a robust tool for profound human transformation.

⁵² Numbers 13:33

⁵³ James Allen, "As a Man thinketh," 1909, https://www.amazon.com/As-Man-Thinketh-James-Allen/dp/1717707106/ref=sr_1_2_sspa?keywords=As+a+man+Thinketh&qid=1555010167&s=gateway&sr=8-2-spons&psc=1, (Date Accessed, October 14, 2018)

⁵⁴ James Allen (28 November 1864 – 24 January 1912) was a British philosophical writer known for his inspirational books and poetry and as a pioneer of the self-help movement. His best-known work, *As a Man thinketh* has been mass-produced since its publication in 1903. It has been a source of inspiration to motivational and self-help authors.

Positive results would edify my belief that spirituality has transformative power. Success with inmate parishioners would bring great honor and respect to the Omnipresent. I am a servant of the Omnipresent and know of the transformative power of the Omnipresent in my own life. I am doing this project because I wish to help others discover this transformative power in their lives too. When my students discover the existence of the Omnipresent within, they will be well positioned for success. They will have found their personal wellspring of transformation and spiritual power. Atheists can also participate and grow. Instead of calling it the Omnipresent, they may think of it as the wellspring of inner peace and inspiration; or as Abraham Lincoln called it in his Inaugural speech, being touched by the “better angels of our nature.”

2. My Successes

I have many success stories which provide much meaning in my life. When I succeed with inmate parishioners, I inexplicably feel that I am doing exactly what I was meant to do—leading people to experience the Omnipresent already existing within and awakening them to the realization that they already exist within the Omnipresent. “The Lord was in this place and I didn’t know it.”⁵⁵ My job is to help people know it.

⁵⁵ Genesis 28:16

CHAPTER 5

WHAT OCCURED IN THE PROJECT?

A. Advertisement Starts the Vetting Process

Gates of Understanding was advertised in both Garner and York through flyers that were put up on bulletin boards, taped to the walls of the housing units, or handed out to inmates directly during my tour of these facilities. This advertising and enrollment phase lasted for two weeks beginning on August 2, 2017 and ending on August 16. Whoever sent notes requesting an application prior to August 16th at Garner and August 17th at York, received an application the following week on August 23rd and 24th, respectively. The applicants then had one week to submit their applications. The deadlines were August 30th and August 31st respectively. (Appendix 1)

I created a two-step administrative model as part of my vetting process. I was vetting for inmates who have an intrinsic interest in participating and not just an extrinsic interest. Intrinsic interest in this case means a person who wants to grow spiritually and emotionally, whereas extrinsic interest means, for example, a person who just wants to get out of their cell and meet other people but has no real interest in fulfilling the class requirements. As you see from the last paragraph, "Follow these instructions carefully," I required applicants to request an application for the program. When applicants focus on these time restraints and enrollment procedures, it suggests that the applicant was interested enough to follow through on the specific instructions; this is the initial phase of the screening.

B. Phase Two of the Vetting Process

The next phase of vetting applicants is found in the review of the applications themselves. First, if the applicant was a college graduate or had at least some college education and the application was decent, he or she was put into the “A” file. Secondly, all applicants who had no college education, but had otherwise more impressive applications than some of the college applicants were also put into the “A” file. Some of these distinguishing features included professional experience, people who were extremely articulate, and those who expressed a strong desire to be part of the program. At York we had 107 applications. After this first pass using the criteria, we had thirty-one applicants in the “A” file and needed to reduce it to eighteen. I was looking for a class size that was not too big, and not too small, for pedagogic reasons and because the rooms we had access to could not accommodate more students.

In the end, a few inmates at York from my Jewish group, who were already very securely in the “A” file, helped me evaluate the other applicants and made four recommendations. These inmate assistants had important insights and knowledge about some inmates in the “A” file and felt compelled to vouch for certain ones. The content of their recommendations was related to the high degree of intrinsic interest these applicants had for this kind of program.

I still had to bring the numbers down to 18. In the end, we decided to raise the number to twenty-two. We achieved Twenty-two by eliminating some college applicants. We decided that we would rank strong non-college applicants more favorably than some weaker college applicants. College applicants were given a preference, but not a guaranteed seat in the program. The same was true for the four recommended students.

The reason for picking the most advanced candidates is because those are the ones who would have an intrinsic interest in growing. I wanted to start with a group that was more likely

to succeed. If I was able to show success, I would be more likely to convince the prison administration to allow me to continue offering *Gates of Understanding*.

C. Establishing the Ideal Class Size

I wanted the group to be big enough to have the possibility of dynamic interactions from a variety of personalities, but not so big that I could not give students what I deemed to be enough individualized attention. The nature of the study requires me to know the students in greater depth than if the study were purely academic. We are speaking about people using spiritual tools to overcome addiction and a strong proclivity for a life of crime. As such, the class size must be manageable. I have been a teacher for over twenty-five years, so I brought to this project some knowledge of group dynamics. I also consulted with the director of chaplains from the Department of Correction, Rev. Dr. Charles Williams, who himself ran programs in the prison for his doctoral degree at Hartford Seminary. He advised that if I wanted twelve students in the class, I should enroll approximately eighteen, because around six, for one reason or another, would not graduate. In the end, with twenty-two enrolled in both groups, we had sixteen who attended regularly and graduated, two who did not meet the attendance requirements and four who dropped out. The same result occurred in both groups.

At Garner, we had only thirty applicants and needed to eliminate eight. This was accomplished by selecting the applicants who appeared to have the strongest intrinsic interest in spiritual and emotional growth. Only two, out of the twenty-two applicants, had been to college. One was already in my Jewish group, and I was aware of his serious interest in spiritual and emotional development. The other was a transgender individual who submitted a strong application.

The following application questions inherently aided in determining the most suitable participants:

Are you prepared to attend at least 10 out of the 12 sessions so you can graduate?

Gates of Understanding is an interfaith program and we do not make judgments about any faith, or people who do not practice a faith, or people who are atheists. Are you willing to abide by this rule and respect your fellow students regardless of their views and involvement or non-involvement with Faith?

Gates of Understanding is seeking highly motivated students who are trying to improve their life. Does this describe you? Are you willing to keep a daily journal?

Since I needed to create a safe, accepting, non-judgmental class dynamic, I did not consider students who would be judgmental of other faiths or orientations. Also, I wanted people who would put in the work and attend nearly all the classes. Moreover, if a student did not feel “highly motivated” or that “trying to improve their life” did not describe them, then *Gates of Understanding* would not be the right program for them.

All participants were informed about the vetting process including its main rational---- applicants with an intrinsic desire for self-development and who were accepting of others. However, the details of the vetting process were not revealed to the participants until the very last class.

There was much less vetting done with the men. I only needed to eliminate eight applicants. Two of them were eliminated because they indicated that they would merely “try” to not be judgmental of people of LGBTQ identity. By my estimation, “Trying” was not good enough, I needed to know for sure that this would not be a problem. This was an important consideration, not only for idealistic reasons, but it was particularly poignant, since early on, I knew that I would have one transgender student in the men’s group.

Two other Garner applicants were honest enough to confide that it was likely they would not remain in the facility for the duration of the program. I did not want to give them seats in the class, because it would be potentially taking seats away from other individuals who, as far as they knew, would be in the facility for the duration of the program. Two other

applicants were eliminated because their work schedules conflicted with the timing of the program, and they did not indicate that they would be willing or able to adjust their work schedules. Two other Garner men were eliminated because their applications reflected no intrinsic interest in the program. Like the York group, four dropped out, two didn't fulfill the attendance requirements and 16 graduated.

D. Mental Health Status and Enrollment

I was given permission by Garner's Deputy Warden, Kimberly Jones, to enroll only inmates from general population. The term general population means something different at Garner than what it typically means in other facilities. At Garner, general population refers to units that have no mental health status. These non-mental health housing units at Garner are units G, E and A. The rest are considered mental health units, and I was not given permission to enroll inmates from those units. However, I did have one inmate who also attends my Jewish services from C, which is the highest functioning mental health unit. I have worked with this inmate for several years, and I knew he would do well in *Gates of Understanding*. I therefore asked special permission for him to attend and the Deputy Warden permitted it. Mental health ratings in the state prison system range from 1-4, with 4 being the lowest-functioning level. Garner is known as the mental health facility for men in the state of Connecticut. This does not mean that other men's facilities do not have mental health housing units, rather, that a large majority of mental health profiles (including the lowest-functioning individuals) are placed at Garner. Another group that is outside of general population in all facilities is the Restricted Housing Units (RHUs), units in which inmates are placed as a punishment for breaking prison rules, the Physicians Housing Unit (PHU) for the sick and Protective Custody (PC), usually gang members or other persons who would be targeted for revenge in the general population.

As I mentioned earlier, I allocated two weeks for inmates to submit their written requests for an application, two weeks to submit them and I gave myself one week to select and finalize the class roster. I originally planned to disseminate acceptance and rejection letters, but it was not practical to do the latter. As such, on the Wednesday and Thursday prior to the start of the class, September 6th and 7th respectively, I delivered twenty-two acceptance letters at York and twenty-three at Garner. In both facilities, there were two students who completed all the requirements of the program but were transferred or discharged from the facility after the completion of the course but prior to graduation.

E. Overview of Student Achievements

The system I am using to convey student achievements includes three achievement markers that comprise their GTP status: (1) Graduation, (2) Thriving, and (3) Practicing. Graduation means that the participant fulfilled the minimum attendance and homework requirements of the program and was awarded a graduation certificate. Thriving means the student participated in class discussions, was visibly transformed in a pro-social manner by the experience, and was able to genuinely reflect, orally or in writing, on the core concepts taught in class and in the Spiritual Guide. Practicing means the participant demonstrated active engagement in spiritual practices such as journaling, meditation, and social interactions in a manner that exceeded the assignments and was indicative of a systemic lifestyle change—the purpose of the program. Graduates, whom I was able to interview six months after the program, who were still practicing, received an additional mark of distinction represented by the plus sign (P+). It must not be assumed, however, that individuals who did not receive a plus sign had stopped practicing, rather, that I was unable to verify that they were still practicing. The reason I was unable to verify in these instances was either because these students transferred to facilities outside my territory or ended their time of incarceration and were no longer accessible

to me. All individuals, except one, whom I was able to interview months after the program were still practicing one or more core techniques. The most popular practice that stuck with the students was journaling. Other practices that stuck were reading self-help literature, including re-reading Spiritual Guide for the Incarcerated, and thinking differently about life. For example, one student said, "I am thinking differently about stuff." Another student shared, "I realized that I don't have to respond to people who are bothering me; I can stay calm and just smile inside." Another commented, "I am a prince of God, and I'm not getting in the mud with people. I've got bigger things on my mind."

Since there were no significant difference in outcomes in both the Garner and York groups, the GTP status will be expressed in a combined total of forty-four students, twenty-two from Garner and twenty-two from York.

44 students were enrolled in the program. 32 graduated: 16 from Garner and 16 from York. 12 did not graduate, six from each group, respectively. Among the 12 students who did not graduate, eight dropped out and four didn't fulfill the attendance requirements. Among the 32 who graduated, thirty thrived and two failed to thrive. The two who graduated, but failed to thrive, fulfilled the minimum requirements, but remained too quiet and closed to determine if they were thriving. Curiously, one of these two students who failed to visibly thrive, was still writing in his journal six months after graduation. For this non-expressive individual, his state of thriving was not apparent while in the program but became apparent later through his journaling. The other graduate who failed to visibly thrive returned home, and I was unable to determine whether this student was still practicing. Out of the 30 people who graduated, and visibly thrived during the program, I was able to determine that 26 were still practicing six months after graduation. Concerning the four whom I was unable to make that same determination, three had

been transferred to facilities outside my territory and one was no longer practicing due to an opioid relapse.

What Happened Sequentially in the Program

Now that I have shared the vetting process of establishing the program, some of the administrative hurdles I overcame and a numerical overview of the student's GTP status in the program, I think it is time to unveil how the program occurred sequentially. By sharing it in this format, I provide a clear understanding of not only what happened in the project, but when it happened, how it happened, and how others can facilitate *Gates of Understanding*. In support of this goal, I created the Facilitator's Manual. It contains the lesson plans, homework, core values and dynamic activities that took place in each class as well as observations of important changes that occurred with participants and the general tenor of the class over time. These observations are inserted into the Manual for the purposes fulfilling requirements of this project. Whereas, the Manual itself that I will disseminate to facilitators will not contain all of those observations because many of them are very specific to the project. The reader will see how the curriculum flows, and how certain core skills, such as the long breath meditation and journaling, in particular, are reinforced. I will also indicate things I did not do, but decided I should do, in the next offering of the program. Wherever I did not specifically indicate that I did not do something, the reader is to assume I did it. In the final published version of the Facilitator's Manual, I will not make these annotated distinctions. However, in this manner the reader, for the purposes of this report, will know what occurred in my initial offering of the program, and what I learned to improve the program in the future. After expounding on all of that, I will reflect on why I believe the program was successful using statements made by participants and my own observations.

Journaling was an important practice during the program. However, a warning was given about journaling in a correctional facility. Personal written material that fell into the wrong hands could present a danger to participants, particularly in prison. Therefore, the practice of changing names, places and circumstances was presented as a strategy. If participants were not concerned about any danger, but wanted to maintain privacy, the more that personal journal entries were disguised in a fictitious form, the better. Throughout the Facilitator's Manual which is soon to follow, the reader will see several writing assignments that participants fulfilled. Journaling was introduced as a tool for self-reflection, overcoming loneliness and venting powerful emotions. Nearly all graduates who I interviewed continue journaling nearly two years after the completion of the program.

FACILITATOR'S MANUAL

INTRODUCTION

This is a how-to manual for facilitators of the *Gates of Understanding* prison ministry program. It contains all necessary lesson plans, classroom activities, discussions and audio-visual tools to facilitate the program. The lesson plans help the facilitator identify and teach the fundamental life skills contained in each chapter of the book, Spiritual Guide for the Incarcerated. Together, the Spiritual Guide and the Facilitator's Manual constitute the *Gates of Understanding* prison ministry program.

The facilitator will ultimately use his or her own discretion as to which activities and discussions are most appropriate for their group. Moreover, the facilitator may have additional activities, methods, and pedagogy that may be more appropriate and effective for his or her teaching style, facility, and/or inmate population. For example, there could be certain pedagogic methods that are more effective among Native American populations in North Dakota than African American populations in New York City or Latino populations in New Mexico. There are also differences involving the security level of facilities, the age and gender of the participants, or any number of unforeseen variables that could shape pedagogic decisions.

The Facilitator's Manual is intended to provide powerful and highly effective methods for achieving the objectives contained in *Gates of Understanding*—to improve the quality of spiritual and practical daily life of vetted inmate populations by engaging them in the study of highly impactful therapeutic literature, discussions, audio-visual selections, and dynamic activities.

Each facilitator should master this Manual because it contains material thoughtfully conceived in the trenches of correctional facilities over a period of five years. Moreover, the approaches were tested in two Connecticut prisons and proved to be spiritually and emotionally

transformative for nearly every member of the program. There is a unique culture found in *Gates of Understanding* of which every facilitator should become knowledgeable.

Just as the jazz musician first masters the song he or she will improvise upon, each facilitator should first master the Guide and the Manual before he or she attempts to alter, supplement or improvise upon it.

The work you are about to undertake will enrich and save lives. I welcome you and thank you for carrying this work further. Let us all walk through the *Gates of Understanding*.

Class #1

The core life skill taught: Self-esteem and Spiritual Identity.

Chapter One is the only chapter assigned for the first class in the *Gates of Understanding* program.

Chapter 1, "You Are a Prince of God"

The theme of this chapter is self-esteem and it is linked to the spirituality of identity. It is purposely the first chapter of the program because when a person is willing to improve self-esteem, all other human development becomes possible. I view self-esteem as a prerequisite for all human development. Who we think we are, is who we are likely to become. Human destiny follows our thoughts just as the body follows the head. When a ballerina is learning to twirl her body, she is taught to concentrate only on turning her head. She need not think about turning her body because when she turns her head her body will follow. The same holds true for thoughts. We need only turn our thoughts to a healthy self-identity and our actions will follow.

If we, as spiritual practitioners, can inspire our participants to begin thinking of themselves as royalty of God, we can help them establish a new path in life. They may have grown accustomed to thinking of themselves as bank robbers, drug dealers, or thieves, but having been caught and incarcerated for their crimes, they have been humbled. The loss of freedom

often renders them more receptive to thinking differently and living differently. These changes begin with the adoption of a healthier self-image. Facilitators direct participants to love and cherish themselves just the way they are at this moment in time.

Facilitators can engage participants in a conversation about what being royalty of God means to them personally. Activities for this class include checking in and a trust game. For the checking in portion, have each participant tell the class his/her name, reason for enrolling in the class, and a little bit about him/herself. For the trust game, seat students in a circle. The facilitator walks into the center of the circle with his/her chair. The facilitator instructs three students, whom we will refer to as Jim, Michael, and Mark, to join him or her in the center of the circle, bringing their chairs with them. The facilitator explains to Jim that Michael will rearrange the four chairs around the room after Jim closes his eyes. When Michael is finished rearranging the chairs, Mark is going to lead Jim around the room. Mark will be very careful to lead Jim properly so that Jim does not bump into any of the chairs. Jim must trust Mark to lead him safely. Mark must prove to be trustworthy.

A quick way to get the students to go along with the game is for the facilitator to volunteer to be the first one led around the room and thus demonstrate how the activity is to take place. This will captivate the group and make them very receptive to the leadership of the facilitator. As a rule, facilitators must make themselves vulnerable and share. This will cause the students to be more open to sharing as well.

Observations

Garner: All the participants were extremely guarded at initial check-in, generally only willing to say their names and which housing units they were in. Three participants were willing to say where they came from on the outside. Only two confided their crimes and sentences. The room remained tense until the trust game was introduced. Everything changed after I

demonstrated the game. People began laughing and joking. The transgender student, for example, was very open about her life prior to prison, her crime, and sentence. We kept doing the trust game until everybody had a chance to play all three parts: the one being led, the one leading, and the one who arranges the chairs.

York: Of the women, nineteen out of the twenty-two on the roster were present. One was held back by the officer in her housing unit and two had enrolled, but never came. The women were much more open than the men at check-in. One woman proudly shared that she was gay and what her favorite color was. Eighteen out of twenty students were eager to share where they came from outside of prison. Six women shared what they did professionally out in the world. All the women shared why they enrolled in the class and what they hoped to get out of it. The women reacted like the men during the trust game: It inspired laughter and free conversation while new groups were being assembled.

Class #2

Core Lesson: Self-Introspection

Chapter Two is the only chapter assigned for the second class in the Gates of Understanding program.

Chapter 2: "Where Are You?"

The core concept of the chapter is the accounting of the soul. It is the process of taking stock of oneself and the state of one's life. In lesson one, to build self-esteem, students were asked to see themselves in their most evolved form—royalty of God. From there, we segued into Chapter 2, which involves gaining greater awareness of one's life conditions as created by past actions. The positive vision of the future is purposely juxtaposed with the negative self-introspection of the past.

Why is this done? The past could be experienced as a heavy anchor that one lacks the strength to hoist up. Whereas the image of one's future, evolved self comes to strengthen the participant. It serves as a magnet and a destination, helping the participant with a reason to hoist up the heavy anchor. It provides hope and a path forward. A positive image of the future is being used to remedy a negative image of the past. It is not enough to run from evil in oneself, one must also run towards good in oneself.

Another important aspect of the lesson is an attempt to strengthen what psychiatrist Sigmund Freud defined in the human psyche as the super-ego. Theoretically, the super-ego is the moralistic part of the human mind that asks questions of oneself such as, "Is this the right thing for me to be doing?"

The process of self-introspection, in our case, involves participants addressing in the privacy of their inner sanctums, their crimes and the events in their lives that led them to their incarceration. The Chapter also discusses how falling out of contact with God or one's higher nature led to incarceration and losing one's way in life. It invites participants to ask themselves many questions, but more than any one question, it introduces participants to an overall process of conducting an accounting of his/her life.

Facilitators should engage parishioners in a discussion on the ways in which they have taken stock of their lives in the past and how they might do so in the future. How do their images during self-introspection contrast with images of their more evolved state as royalty of God? Students are encouraged to share their thoughts.

Activities

Audio-visual clip of a motivational speaker.⁵⁶ (I did not play this video in this first offering and upon reflection realized that it is something I would do in the next offering of the program.)

Observations

In both groups, students related to this distinction between their pasts and futures in terms of the progress they had made since the time they were admitted to the prison. They mostly spoke about how rebellious they were at first and how they calmed down and started to make the best of their circumstances. One of the York students said, “Rabbi, look at my picture (referring to her I.D. badge). Do you see how messed up I looked then? And look at me now!”

Class #3

Core Lessons: Discernment, Compassionate Listening, Humor as a Coping Mechanism.

Chapters Three and Four are the chapters assigned for the third class in the *Gates of Understanding* program.

Chapter 3: “You’re Hanging Around the Wrong People”

The objective of this Chapter is cultivating in participants a sufficient measure of discernment to stay away from people who deter them from their personal and spiritual goals. Birds of a feather flock together, and usually share the same fate. People are highly social and are generally followers. A recovering drug addict, for example, who shares a room with a person who is actively using, is hanging around the wrong person and is at much greater risk for relapse. If you live in the bakery, eventually you eat cookies. Likewise, getting into a car with a friend who happens to be a neighborhood drug dealer places one at greater risk for getting arrested. People who have made changes in their lives but have not cut ties with those who

⁵⁶ GET UP & GET IT DONE - New Motivational Video Compilation for Success & Studying
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V3WrCx3mwNo>

have not made such changes are anchoring themselves to the same old life that led them to prison.

This chapter addresses real-life situations where the lessons of self-esteem and accounting of the soul are applied through actions. Participants must hoist up old anchors while gracefully allowing themselves to be pulled forward by the magnetism of their noble future. It is a good early test to see what kind of pushback and reservations participants have for acting upon the spiritual guidance offered in the program. Will they cling to their old lives or will they be willing to start completely new ones? Program facilitators should make a special effort to observe the reactions of participants during this lesson. They can refer to those reactions in subsequent classes to inform them as to what points need to be emphasized. Up until now, the material has been about thoughts. This is the first chapter that is about actions. Forming new and better thoughts is the first step. Acting on them is the second step.

Activities

Compassionate listening exercise skits. The facilitator prepares three envelopes that he or she gives to a participant who plays the role of listener. In the first envelope there is a note titled *Distracted Listening* and a description of distracted listening behavior. In the second envelope there is a note titled *Devoted Listening* and a description of devoted listening behavior. And in the third envelope there is a note titled *Compassionate Listening* and a description of Compassionate Listening behavior. A second student is chosen to play the role of speaker. The speaker receives an envelope asking him or her to share a problem, predicament, concern, or ambition with the listener. The speaker will tell the story three times to the listener, and each time, the listener will listen in the three modes of listening, distracted, devoted, and compassionate. The same story is told to the listener all three times. After each telling, the facilitator asks the speaker how he or she felt about sharing with the listener.

Observations

The story teller expressed how validated they felt when the listener was listening in a dedicated and compassionate way. Conversely, they expressed feeling very disrespected and aggravated when the listener listened in an uncaring way.

This exercise lead to one of the Garner students feeling comfortable enough to share being very upset by the prospect of an innocent African-American being hauled into prison as an accessory to a crime just for being in a car with a drug dealer when there was no evidence that this innocent individual was complicit in any way with the drug dealer's business enterprises. The class understood this concern being relevant to the lesson, "Your hanging around the wrong people." This led to a discussion about racial profiling by police and hyper-incarceration. The concern was addressed by the other students who stated that since we all know this situation to be true, we must be even more discerning about who we associate with when we are released. I did not detect any resistance from either the York or Garner groups, to the suggestion that one should be careful with whom they spend time, especially with whom they ride with in a car.

Chapter 4: "The Mysterious Power of Humor"

So far in the program, the group has dealt with very difficult subjects involving skills that take a lot of effort to understand and perform. In order to tackle such difficult subject, it becomes necessary to have some comic relief. The program cannot be so serious all the time or it will not be effective. Facilitators should inject their own unique sense of humor into every lesson. You need not wait until Chapter Four before saying or doing something funny. I am not suggesting necessarily jokes with punch lines, but situational comedy or whatever comes to mind naturally.

Moreover, humor is more than just comic relief; it has the power to make participants more receptive to your teachings. Humor brings into view a bigger reality that includes a wide

spectrum of emotions. Humor enables people to reframe intolerable situations by thinking of things differently. Humor is a powerful survival technique that enables a person to acquire a healthy level of detachment.

The person who can laugh at things, particularly while incarcerated, is going to survive spiritually and emotionally much more effectively than a person who cannot. Finally, when very profound and painful personal lessons are taught, the use of humor becomes necessary to keep the participant's attention and to make the material digestible. Generally, the more painful and difficult a certain lesson is, the greater need for humor. Core life skill taught: Resilience through humor and joy.

Class #4

Core Lesson: Long Breath Meditation, Coping Mechanisms for Enduring Pain and Discomfort

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 are the chapters assigned for the fourth class in the *Gates of Understanding* program.

Chapter 5: "Meditation Is the Goal of Prayer"

With progress made in self-esteem, accounting of the soul, and detachment through humor, meditation is now introduced on a firm foundation. Meditation is a powerful tool to protect and enhance all these prior investments. Meditation goes beyond an accounting of past wrongs and future virtues, and challenges participants to be intensely involved in the present by observing the inner workings of their own mind.

Most people in the incarcerated population here in the United States are from Abrahamic religions and are more familiar with prayer than meditation. By breaking prayer into four levels with meditation being the highest form, I am trying to help participants feel more comfortable with meditation as a personal practice. Until this time, many may have viewed meditation as strictly an eastern religious practice. By establishing meditation as part of prayer

and pointing to a scriptural reference to it in Psalms, I am hoping to engender greater receptivity among parishioners to the practice.

Why is meditation so important and why will prayer not suffice? It has been my observation that prayer, for many, remains on the level of wish fulfillment and as a request for God to do the hard work individuals must do for themselves. By engaging in meditation and conversing as a group about the encounter, the practice becomes more understandable. When participants learn that others also wander away from focusing on their breath and all sorts of “failures,” they grow less intimidated by meditation. When they discover that there is no need to assume daunting yoga postures, and all they must do is sit comfortably and breathe or imagine a few things, they become more at ease with the practice.

I believe the fast-track for personal, spiritual, and emotional transformation is found through meditation. When participants grow acutely aware of their inner thoughts, it becomes much harder for them to be reactive. That is why I introduce the practice early in the program. It is a skill we will reinforce from a variety of perspectives as we progress through the program. Inculcating this skill goes beyond an academic activity and requires a regiment that is more akin to a training that establishes habits and muscle memory.

Chapter 6: “The Journey from Dust to Spirit”

Now that students have hopefully become more receptive to meditation from Chapter 5, Chapter 6 provides a focus and spiritual perspective on mindfulness. Mindfulness is associated with spirit and mindlessness is associated with dust. It is our responsibility to be mindful. How mindful or mindless we decide to be, determines where we are on our personal journey from dust to spirit.

We are the Biblical Adam. God is blowing the breath of life into our lungs every moment. When we are present to this thought, we become more and more of a living soul. The

Chapter shows how these universal spiritual truths can be derived from the original scriptural sources.

Chapter 7: “King Solomon’s Ring”

This Chapter was inspired by observations of inmates enduring restricted housing conditions like solitary confinement which often comes as a punishment for alleged bad behavior. During these observations, the cells were very hot, and some inmates were having a difficult time coping. The chapter, “King Solomon’s Ring,” was a story I told these inmates, and it appeared to ease their suffering. The notion that “this too shall pass,” presents the empowering thought that suffering does not last forever. It is a type of meditation applied to remedy suffering.

When people know that their current suffering is temporary and relief is on the way, they tend to gain a perspective that takes their minds off the suffering and enables them to attach themselves to the future, which includes relief and comfort.

King Solomon’s ring had inscribed on it, “This too shall pass,” and he meditated on the meaning of those words in times of difficulty.

Activities for this class are: (1) a discussion on how people cope with pain. What has helped them personally cope with pain? What is the difference between physical pain and emotional pain? How are these types of pain treated? It is a time to share and learn from each other. (2) A discussion concerning the question, who are you, body or soul? (3) A discussion on who is watching you when you meditate? A clip about the scientifically proven benefits of meditation is shown at the start of class. Long breath meditation is demonstrated and practiced. Students are asked to make a few notes in their journals about how they felt before and after the long breath meditation. We discuss the change in consciousness and why it occurred.

Long breath meditation is a practice of filling up one's lung completely, holding the breath for five seconds and then letting it out slowly as if exhaling through a thin straw. When the breath is being exhaled, the practitioner is consciously letting go of all stressful feelings. Participants are directed to drop their shoulders, relax their neck, chest, mid-section, legs and feet. Just let it all go. Hold onto nothing. Let the release take place with the exhalation. The participant is asked to try to avoid thinking with language but to simply be present to the rush of air coming in and out. In thirty seconds, participants can slow their heart rates and radically lower their stress level. I encourage the reader to practice one such breath to see if my description is accurate.

Dynamic Activity

Challenging life interactions are simulated with students called to the center of the room to participate in a roleplay. The skit involves an abusive roommate attacking the student verbally. A script was provided to each student and they were given ample time to prepare. While the verbal assault is taking place, the victim is practicing the long breath meditation technique in a way that is undetectable. Afterwards, in the presence of the class, the facilitator interviews the student as to the effect of the breathing technique utilized during the verbal assault. Consciousness is viewed on a spectrum ranging from tunnel vision to expansive vision. Meditation is seen as the means of expanding consciousness and enabling students to see more options that include doing absolutely nothing or simply walking away. Students are given the assignment to utilize the meditative tool demonstrated in the simulated drill throughout the week when stressful incidents present. Students are asked to reflect on these incidents in their journals and share them with their classmates in the next session.

Observations

Individuals in both groups were surprised by the immediate and powerful results of the Long Breath Meditation technique. A Garner participant commented, "Damn, this stuff is dope; are you sure it's legal in here?" Several of the York women said, "Wow, and it's free!" During these discussions, there was much laughter and by this time, the comfort level of students had become the new norm for the rest of the program. From this point on, the relationship between the facilitator and the participants transcended the question of trust to a strong bond of friendship. This was evidenced by complete openness by 75% of the class, much laughter and a desire to speak and be heard. The balance of the participants in both groups would reach this level in the last few sessions except for two participants who failed to visibly thrive.

*<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D5r2sBQM31k>⁵⁷

*I did not play this video in this first offering of the program and upon reflection realized that it is something I would do in the next offering.

Core life skills taught: Long breath meditation, thinking of the temporary nature of suffering as a coping mechanism and imagination of improved circumstances in the future.

Class #5

Core Lesson: Acceptance of Addiction, Ancient and Modern Methods of Overcoming.

Chapters 8 is the only chapter assigned for the fifth class in the *Gates of Understanding* program.

Chapter 8, "Is It a Sin to Take Drugs?"

The point of this Chapter is to address a very special profile amongst drug addicts; those who have shown themselves to be completely helpless before the substance of their addiction.

⁵⁷ "Mindfulness In Everyday Life" Jon Kabat Zinn with Oprah Winfrey [Mindfulness 360 - Center For Mindfulness](#), Published on Oct 16, 2017. With the demands of modern times, it can be difficult to live a life that feels truly balanced. Scientist and author Jon Kabat-Zinn says mindfulness can be a vital tool in cutting through the noise of daily life. "What mindfulness is saying is [that you should] find your own way. Listen to your own heart,"

They have been incarcerated numerous times for possessing and taking illegal drugs, have been to countless addiction services and recovery programs, and received multiple emergency medical interventions.

The Chapter explores their humanity and even traces their profile to holy people living in ancient Israel. The Torah narrative references the uncontrollable and insatiable drive for intoxication in positive terms. What is meant by “positive terms?” A person with a proclivity to be intoxicated so potently and frequently, has the traits of a holy aesthetic known as a Nazarite. Drug addiction still alludes most experts. Success remains scarce even in the best programs. As such, *Gates of Understanding* presents its own bold and novel insight worthy of exploration. The underlying ethos of this approach is that the thirst for drug intoxication is a misdirected thirst for divine intoxication. Prior to the sacred Nazarite vow, the latent Nazarite mistook the intoxication of the vine for the intoxication of the Divine. Such individuals need help in redirecting their powerful drives to their sacred calling. In ancient Israel, this redirection required removing them completely from the substance of their addiction as well as everything that triggered it. In the case of wine, triggers included, grapes, raisins, grape juice, grape skins, grape leaves, grape seeds, and even vinegar. In modern times we understand triggers to include all substances, persons or places which promote an addict’s loss of control.

The biblical approach was not to cure the addiction but to redirect it. As such, a person must replace their drug addiction with an addiction to five things that promote God intoxication: (1) Study; (2) Prayer; (3) Meditation; (4) Acts of loving kindness; [5] Physical Exercise and Nutrition. The acrostic is SPMAP, or Spirit Map.

Nazarites require this level of structure and devotion to redirect their drug addiction. They are counseled to join a spiritual community and attach themselves to people who share their passion for God intoxication. When Nazarites live out their sacred vow, they assume the

position of shamans in society, but when they violate it, they become society's derelicts. The ancient Nazarites are like a modern-day Harvard professor of mine, who advised that he knows he is allergic to alcohol because every time he drinks it, he breaks out into cuffs.

This chapter introduces the sacred vow of sobriety the Nazarite entered. In class, the facilitator conducts a dynamic activity whereby a panel of three judges hears the Nazarite vow of the participant and evaluates its sincerity. The facilitator leads the group in conversations about what occurred in each Nazarite vow. If the three judges are not convinced by the testimony of the aspiring Nazarite, the Nazarite candidate, is confronted with a level of accountability unlike any experienced before. The rest of the class will also have an opportunity to provide direct feedback when the judges are done offering their own. Feedback offered in both the Garner and York groups included, "No, I don't believe you currently have the resolve to stop using because you said you would 'try' not to use and trying is not a very strong word. This was a vow and I didn't feel you were making a solemn vow."

Drug addicts are used to fooling non-drug addicts with their promises and heartfelt declarations. However, it takes one to know one and drug addicts are not used to being called on their deceptive expressions by people who know all their tricks. A drug addict has lots of practice falling off the wagon but how much practice do they have staying on the wagon? We give them that practice and help them build the spiritual attributes needed for the battle.

Even the individuals who did not pass the test of the Nazarite vow shared that the experience helped them learn about themselves and where they were on their journey to sobriety. It made them realize that they were not ready and what they needed to do to get ready.

The facilitator must constantly remind the Nazarite candidate, the judges and the group offering honest critical feedback, that we are here to help each other and not hurt each other.

The participants seemed eager to pass judgement, and curiously, the people making the vow were eager to hear those judgements. In a society where it is often deemed politically incorrect to be judgmental of others, participants were excited to be able to pass judgement upon fellow classmates and did so in a compassionate and forthright manner.

Play this clip at the start of class: *<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ukFjH9odsXw> ⁵⁸

The clip explains some of the chemistry involved in drug addiction.

*I did not play this clip in this program offering, but upon reflection would do so in the next program offering.

Class #6

Chapters 9 is the only chapter assigned for the sixth class in the *Gates of Understanding* program.

Chapter 9: "Falling Asleep in the Field of Poppies"

Core Lesson: Social and Chemical Solutions to Drug Addiction

To gain the respect of your participants, you must accomplish two important things: (1) demonstrate that you understand them and their unique problems; and (2) earn their confidence in the idea that you know how to guide them from their life of addiction and crime to a better way of being in the world. By now, you are halfway into the program and hopefully, you have already accomplished this. This Chapter helps to reinforce it and drives it to even greater levels.

The Chapter employs a bit of humor with its references to the "Wizard of Oz" and the field of poppies. As well as Jack and Jill, the children who went up and down the hill. The use of

⁵⁸ The Chemistry of Addiction, [SciShow](#), Published on Nov 18, 2012 Hank describes how our brains respond biochemically to various addictive substances and behaviors and where those responses have come from, evolutionarily speaking.

humor is for a specific purpose and facilitators should understand a broad philosophical principle running through *Gates of Understanding*. The more serious the matter, the greater need for humor. Humor breaks down defenses, it endears the facilitator to the participants and enables the participants to be more receptive to what the facilitator has to offer. Mary Poppins had it right, “a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down.”

This Chapter contains deep insights as to various drivers of drug addiction and illegal drug sales gained by this reporter through thousands of hours speaking with inmates between the years 2013-2018. It was also gained through the study of Gabor Mate’s work published in his book, *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts*.⁵⁹ Drugs account for nearly 50% of incarcerations. This does not even include crimes of larceny, assault and murder that are often directly related to drug addiction and the drug trade. It is safe to say that drugs are the main driver of incarceration in the United States.⁶⁰

Generally successful drug dealers are amongst the most intelligent individuals among incarcerated populations. The facilitator must be smarter and not be afraid to talk directly and with conviction to drug dealers among participants. They are endowed with advanced social skills, salesmanship and executive functioning that enable them to thrive in their field. They have a strong tendency to rationalize their crimes and are generally very hard nuts to crack. But with the right nutcracker, one can crack hard nuts. One such individual in my Garner group opined,

“Rabbi, to be honest with you, I do not regret shooting my victim. I came to his house as a gentleman to ask about some missing product stolen from my house. He decided to pull a gun on me, and of course I was ready for that possibility and shot him first. No Rabbi, I am not sorry I shot him, I am pissed off at him

⁵⁹ Gabor, Mate and Peter A. Levine. *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts: Close Encounters with Addiction*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2017.

⁶⁰ The Trumpet, “*The Root Cause of Mass Incarceration*,” June 1, 2018, (Date of Access) May 3, 2019, <https://www.thetrumpet.com/17326-the-root-cause-of-mass-incarceration>

that he made me shoot him and now I am locked up for a really long time because of what he did.”

It took a more emotionally and spiritually evolved member of the class from a similar background to retort,

“Yes, I think we all understand that, at that point in time, you had to shoot first or you would have been killed, but I believe what the Rabbi is talking about is regretting the day you crossed the line and put yourself in this illegal drug industry in the first place.”

This classmate made the facilitator’s point for him. This will frequently occur if you stand out of the way and allow it to happen.

As facilitators, you must let the students know that you understand their tendency to rationalize and deflect. You must overpower them with your knowledge and lead them to the spiritual message and lifestyle change that is the purpose of your ministry. However, whenever possible, let classmates win these arguments for you. In this case, the point was made by one major drug dealer to another major drug dealer. There is nothing more favorable for the facilitator than this. Let it happen, you are a facilitator, not a lecturer. You are not there to win an argument or show that you are smarter than them, but at the same time you must do both of those things to gain their respect. There are some arguments you can only win with the help of others. Then, and only then, will the smartest members of the group be receptive to your spiritual teaching. Without accomplishing these things, they will view you as a lightweight and merely a source of entertainment. On some level, they want you to win their respect and show them a better way of being in the world, that is why they signed up for your program.

The class activity was, once again, the Nazarite Vow. But this time it involved recovering drug dealers and three of their classmates serving as judges who were recovering drug addicts. Start

this class by playing a clip exploring the causes of drug addiction and the Rat Park experiments.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d-OKfwFCMRM> ⁶¹

Discuss the clip and introduce other opinions which ascribe more weight to chemical causes and solutions to drug addiction. Play this clip that makes that argument.

*<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NxHNxmJv2bQ> ⁶² Discuss both the chemical causes and social causes of drug addiction and ask students to share their thoughts on the subject.

* I did not play the chemical clip on this first offering, just the Rat Park experiment clip, but upon further reflection I would play both clips and discuss them in my next offering.

The purpose of the Rat Park clip is to bring out the idea of a person rebuilding their life in concert with the people they love. Living life with family and friends and not being isolated. Most successfully recovering drug addicts speak of the importance of social support for their recovery. The practice of recovering people surrounding themselves with others who are recovering successfully and others who suffer no drug addictions and are living a pro-social life style, is introduced as a model for consideration.

Making use of psychiatric pharmacological intervention is presented as part of an overall recovery plan. The point of these clips is not to promote one school of thought over another, but to introduce students to the leading spheres of thought and theory concerning drug addiction; and to solicit their thoughts on the subject in a dynamic group conversation. Ultimately, the suggestion is to take the best parts of each philosophy for maximum success

⁶¹ Did Rats Start the Drug War? | Freethink Wrong, published on Jan 11, 2018, much of our shared understanding about drugs and addiction came from a series of studies done in the 1950s and 60s on lab rats. But a skeptical researcher has designed his own study.

⁶² Mechanism of Drug Addiction in the Brain, Animation. Alila Medical Media, Published on Sep 10, 2014.

assuming a wholistic approach. In the process of such discussions, you are also showing them spiritual tools.

Core skills taught: Acceptance, Honesty and Free Will

The Nazarite vow before a tribunal, is presented as an event that invites recovering drug addicts and drug dealers to articulate their desire for recovery and to take a stand concerning the present and future course of their life. It is a window of opportunity that allows the command center of the brain to issue some executive orders. It is also a model that recognizes that a desire for intoxication in it of itself is not negative but depends upon the source of intoxication.

A formal plan is presented as a new practice: A recovering drug addict or persons addicted to substances or activities, seeks intoxication from five alternate spheres of activity: (1) Study; (2) Prayer; (3) Meditation; (4) Acts of loving kindness; [5] Physical Exercise and Nutrition. We remind students of the acrostic SPMAP and that these five things are their Spiritual Map. Students create a *graph calendar where they check how many of these activities, they accomplish each day. The effects of this practice as they occur, are discussed in class throughout the course.

*I did not introduce this graph in the first offering but upon further reflection would do so in the next offering.

Class #7

Core Lesson: Positive Attitude

Chapters 10, 11 and 12 are the chapters assigned for the seventh class in the *Gates of Understanding* program. All three chapters are about positive attitudes that change everything for the better.

Chapter 10, "Cultivating an Attitude of Gratitude"

The Chapter is based on a true story and captures the profound wisdom people often find at the very end of their lives. The story is about a millionaire whose money could not buy him a cure for his disease and his confession that he would give all his money for a cure if he could. If any person, you the facilitator, or the participants could internalize this lesson, many problems, both big and small would instantly dissolve. If people simply got in touch emotionally and spiritually with the value of their health and the blessings they have been endowed with in their bodies, they would feel very rich, fortunate and happy, even if they had nothing else. Yet, we all quickly forget. Could spiritual practice be about remembering?

This short story introduces participants to the spiritual practice of cultivating an attitude of gratitude by thinking about the value of any number of bodily blessings. Contemplating the value of toes, eyes, ears, mouth, arms, legs and so forth. How much would we pay to keep any one of them? Actions you will take: Homework assignment: Write in your journal five things you appreciate most in your life. Try to put a monetary value on the following body parts: tiny toe, pointing finger, eyes, legs, arms and ears. How much money would you accept to give up one of those body parts?

Core life skill taught: Gratitude

Chapter 11, “Dreams and Dreamers”

The Chapter focuses upon two biblical characters, Joseph and David, who exemplified a winner’s attitude. Some people, regardless of the hardships that life visits upon them, always seem to stay cheerful and turn it all around in their favor.

Another story a facilitator can tell to bring out this idea is the story of the angry farmer who decided to bury his stubborn mule. He throws his mule into a ditch and starts shoveling dirt on top of her. What a terrible fate this poor mule faces being buried alive, one might think. But every time the angry farmer shoveled dirt onto the mule’s back, she silently shook it off to the

side. Eventually after the farmer had filled in all the dirt, the mule was standing on level ground again.

The story also focuses on the power of forgiveness regarding Joseph, his brothers and others that betrayed him in Egypt. Joseph's immaturity as a young man is referenced, and how he eventually matured. Facilitators can assign participants with long prison sentences the task of writing a letter expressing forgiveness to their younger, more immature self that committed the crime that got them incarcerated so long ago. You can give these individuals this personal assignment, but you need not feel that you must always give every participant the same assignment. In the Garner group there were two students who were given this assignment and in the York group one. Others were given the assignment of writing a letter forgiving a person that betrayed them. They were not asked to mail it, just write it. The following week we discussed how they felt after writing it. As expected, they all felt to varying degrees, a sense of relief and thought the assignment was worthwhile.

The concept of positive revenge is discussed. Thriving before your enemies is better than hurting them. Also, the power to choose positive or negative thinking is presented once again. It is the concept of taking spiritual responsibility for oneself.

The story of David and how he was selected to become King of Israel is told. We see how his family betrayed him and how he decided to separate himself from them so that he could realize his own unique destiny. This is an important story for people who were born into crime families. They too have the option to leave their families, and start their own family and circle of friends, outside a life of crime.

You can ask participants if they can relate to this idea from their own family life and if they would like to share how it is for them. How can we practically deal with parents who are

deeply entrenched in a life of crime? How do we continue to respect and love them as parents, even if we must leave them for our own survival and success?

Observations

At York there was a participant who came from such a background who tearfully shared her story of growing up in a “gang banger” family. I observed her as feeling very overwhelmed with the prospect of disassociating herself from her biological family, but at the same time she was listening intently. She appeared to be genuinely considering the idea.

Core Values: Forgiveness and Discernment

Chapter 12, “Be Holy Because I am Holy”

This Chapter speaks about avoiding bad actions not out of fear of being caught, but for the gift of acquiring holiness. So often our society directs us to material rewards for good behavior. This Chapter reminds us that the greatest, and most satisfying, rewards for good behavior are spiritual rewards. The way you feel is strongly affected by what you do. There is an inner feeling of holiness that is extremely pleasurable that we can all acquire through good deeds.

The facilitator can now ask students if they have ever performed favors for others anonymously. For those who have done so, follow up by asking them how this practice made them feel. The picture that usually emerges is that at first, it feels unnatural, but eventually, an inner feeling of deep satisfaction occurs. Once such a feeling is expressed in class, the facilitator should advise that, this is the feeling that the Omnipresent desired us to feel when the Omnipresent directed us to “Be holy because I am holy.”

You can give participants an assignment to perform an anonymous act of goodwill to a neighbor and to record in their journal any feelings that arose from having done it. Time is always made for sharing journal entries in class.

Core life skills taught: Positive Thinking, Generosity and Honesty

Class #8

Core Lesson: Self-Control, Long Breath Meditation, Elevating Your Game

Chapters 13, 14 and 15 are the Chapters assigned for the eighth class in the *Gates of Understanding* program.

Chapter 13, "The Secret of Patience and Non-violence"

Long breath meditation theory is presented as a tool students can use to remedy their reactive nature. All three chapters assigned for this session teach, in varying forms, this same skill; overcoming one's reactive nature through the power of the breath and contemplation of one's primary motivations. Chapter 14 describes the awakening that occurs when one contemplates their primary motivation, and Chapter 15 models long breath meditation practiced in the heat of a confrontation. More is explained about long breath meditation in chapter 15.

Start the class by playing Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s, I Have a Dream speech.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I47Y6VHc3Ms>⁶³ Before you play it or tell them you are

going to play it, ask your participants to take out their journals and write a sentence or two

describing how they feel. After the clip is played, once again ask them to write a few sentences

about how they feel. Predictably, participants will feel very uplifted and moved by the speech.

Choose participants to read the entries from their journals from before and after the clip. When

you have finished, ask this series of rhetorical questions: Do you see how watching this speech

changed your brain chemistry? Do you see that brain chemistry can be changed very quickly

without drugs? When you pursue your need for positive chemical changes in your brain from

⁶³ Martin Luther King, "I Have A Dream" Speech, [LogistiKHD](#), Published on Aug 28, 2013.

wholesome sources, you become more educated and refined. You are getting high in positive ways. Can you see it? Have I not demonstrated it?

I would suggest really preaching this point because, as much as it is obvious, it is overlooked. You are in prison ministry, it's time to put on your minister's hat. The group just heard one of the all-time great ministers preach and have become sensitized to this form of communication. You should exploit it!

Chapter 14, "From Terrorist to Super Lawyer"

This is a true story and demonstrates, according to *Gates of Understanding's* philosophy, how a criminal mind is most likely rehabilitated. The core philosophy driving *Gates of Understanding* is that rehabilitation occurs from elevating human nature, not by obliterating it. Moreover, it is not possible to obliterate human nature and that is why that approach never works.

The protagonist in this story, Doug, is a young man who had a strong desire to protect his people from terrorists, by fighting against their terrorism with his own brand of terrorism. His decision to enter the arena of terrorism was based on his reactive anger which lacked a thoughtful strategy. If he hadn't learned to be in touch with his core motivation---protecting his people, he would have remained consumed in his rage and acts of terrorism.

At first, his motivation for getting a law degree was to try and help his terrorist friends get out of prison. Along the way however, he realized that he could sue oil rich states for their state sponsored acts of terrorism. Everybody around him told him that his idea was crazy, and it would never work. When he inquired as to why they held that opinion, his detractors said, "you can't sue terrorists." Subsequently, he analyzed their view and found that it was based on a false belief that terrorists had an intrinsic desire to shed the blood of their enemies and would not be deterred by the rule of law. Being a terrorist himself, he knew that he was motivated by the

desire to protect his people and not necessarily by spilling blood. The spilling of blood was only a by-product, or a necessary evil to protect his people.

During his years of incarceration, he matured and realized that just as he was motivated by a sincere desire to protect his people, so were his enemies. Neither he nor his enemies were wedded to terrorism per se. What they were wedded to however, was and still is, protecting their people.

Like all political enterprises, the wheels are turned by financial assets. If he could sue states for billions of dollars because of their state sponsored acts of terrorism, he could systemically challenge their entire terror network. This is exactly what he did. There were seeds of holiness in his crime that he transplanted. They sprouted and grew. He evolved from a terrorist to a super-lawyer with worldwide clout.

Proving this theory in criminal rehabilitation is beyond the scope of this ministry project, but is at the same time, the core belief that drives it. Alas, one need not always be a meteorologist to know that it is raining.

The facilitator should lead a discussion based on these questions: What are the seeds of holiness in your crime? Are you receptive to elevating it from the realm of vice to virtue? What does that look like for you? Can you describe it? These questions should be assigned as journal challenges as well for continued probing and sharing in subsequent classes.

Observations:

Drug dealers in the Garner group shared their interest in establishing legitimate businesses when they got out. They said they were elevating the seeds of their crime by learning how to create a business plan and researching markets.

Chapter 15, "Cinderella Man and Long Breath Meditation"

Cinderella Man, a boxing drama, is not completely accurate in its depiction of its real-life characters but conveys a great message of how the power of spirit triumphs over brute force.

Gates of Understanding focuses on the long breath meditation technique practiced by Cinderella Man. The long breath meditation is a form of meditation that is extremely useful in the heat of the moment. By taking a very slow long breath, one can slow down their heartbeat in a few seconds. This enables a person to make better decisions while under pressure. In the movie, the technique is shown in practice during the banquet scene. The provocation, the non-reactive response, the escalation and the second non-reactive response are watched repeatedly and discussed. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iAc7d5LWB_o⁶⁴

Stressful situations cause the heart to accelerate and the rational mind to become less in charge of decision making. Long Breath Meditation in *Gates of Understanding* is a discipline whereby a person makes a conscious decision to take long relaxing breaths during stressful situations. This practice aids one in regaining their rational non-reactive mind.

The facilitator should practice the technique to gain a measure of confidence so that the lesson can be taught with confidence and conviction. Additional assignments are in the readings and include observing the breathing pattern of another person during a stressful encounter. These observations are written in student journals and shared in class.

Facilitators should consider using technology to demonstrate how quickly the long breath meditation slows the heartbeat. There are simple devices one can bring to class to help demonstrate this point. You can role play stressful interactions. You can take pulse readings before and after a stressful activity. Observe how quickly the long breath lowers the pulse. Then

⁶⁴ CM Baer dinner, [estoyxbien](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iAc7d5LWB_o), Published on Oct 12, 2008.

record the results of the same role play wherein the long breath was not practiced. It is a quick and easy way to demonstrate the efficacy of this simple meditative technique.

*I did not use such a device in my first offering of the program nor engage in a conversation about the results of these heart rate measurements. However, upon further reflection, I believe incorporating this technology in a dynamic class activity would be extremely efficacious. It can also be done by placing two fingers on the carotid artery in the neck.⁶⁵ With this method, one can track the amount a heart beats per minute with the aid of a watch that has a minute hand.

Class #9

Core Lesson: Expanding Consciousness, Positive Thinking, Taking Ultimate Responsibility

Chapters 16, 17 and 18 are the chapters assigned for the ninth class in the *Gates of Understanding* program.

Chapter 16, "Declaring Spiritual Bankruptcy"

The objective of this Chapter, which comes towards the end of the program, is to reinforce the ethos of personal responsibility. In the world of business and finance, a person has the option of declaring bankruptcy which absolves them of certain financial obligations. My concern is that people who adopt a spiritual life, particularly in prison, could develop an expectation that they can be absolved of their responsibilities because of their new spiritual life. A person who has such an expectation, is attempting to declare Spiritual Bankruptcy.

To comprehend this point, the Chapter directs students to adopt the perspective of a person whose personal property was damaged by another individual. They are asked to consider how they would feel if the person responsible for the damage announced that they did not have to pay because they have found a new spiritual life.

⁶⁵ Mayo Clinic, "Checking pulse over the carotid artery," 2019, (Date accessed, May 3, 2019) <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/fitness/multimedia/checking-pulse-over-the-carotid-artery/img-20006075>

Chapter 17, "Opening Our Eyes"

This Chapter addresses the effect of reactive behavior upon our perception of the world. Anger and revenge tend to narrow our view of the world, whereas prayer and meditation widen it. We see this in the story of Hagar whose son Ishmael, is dying of dehydration in the desert. Because she is in a deep state of distress, she is unable to see a well of water right before her. However, after she engages in a heartfelt prayer to the Omnipresent and receives a consoling word, suddenly she can see it. The well was not miraculously created, it was before her the entire time. The only thing that changed was her state of mind.

The lesson applies to us. At different points in our daily experience, we encounter emotions such as anger, revenge and jealousy which narrow our view of our physical environment. By studying this phenomenon, we become more aware as it is occurring. The more aware we become of our shifting states of consciousness, the more adept we become at controlling them. When our view of the world becomes very narrow due to negative emotions, we can turn to prayer and meditation to widen it.

The classroom activity is to invite a participant who has shared something in a very reactive way, to sit in the center of the room with the facilitator. This process is called fish bowling. The rest of the class is to observe the interaction between participant and facilitator silently taking note of what occurs in the conversation. After listening to the problem that the participant has shared, the facilitator asks how the student thinks they can solve their problem. The facilitator now leads the entire class in long breath meditation for about five minutes. When that is completed, the room reverts to fish bowl mode, and the facilitator asks the participant the same question: how they think they can solve their problem.

After the meditation, inevitably, the perception of the participant widens, and new insights are discovered. You have now demonstrated the power of meditation as a tool for living. It is dynamic, simple, powerful and extremely memorable.

Observations

In both the Garner and York groups the solutions provided by the speaker before and after the mediation differed greatly with the more insightful solution coming after the meditation. The speaker in the York group spoke about an abusive roommate and felt trapped and helpless. The only solution she could think of before the meditation was “hang her by the sheets?” she said in jest. After the meditation she said, “we’re not getting along well right now, how about if we talk about this later when we’re not so fired up?” A Garner participant talked about being generous with his coffee, but people interpreted that as a sign of weakness not generosity. His solution prior to the meditation was, “I just won’t share my stuff with people anymore.” Whereas, after the meditation he said, “I would start sharing my stuff with different people who were more likely to appreciate my generosity and treat me right.”

Chapter 18, “The Legend of Two Wolves”

This Cherokee legend teaches that human beings have a choice as to which thoughts we entertain. Since deeds, habits, character and destiny are driven by thought, the thoughts we entertain at any given moment, are our most important decisions. One wolf is responsible for providing a person all their evil thoughts and the other wolf is responsible for providing a person all their good thoughts. The wolf which determines our destiny, is the one we feed.

You can lead a discussion based on these questions: Do you believe we have a choice in what thoughts we choose or are our thoughts out of our control? What does it mean to feed the wolf? In what ways do we feed bad thoughts and in what ways do we feed good thoughts?

After the class has offered their comments, make sure that feeding our thoughts includes what we read, watch, discuss and act upon.

Class #10

Core Lesson: Simple, Allegorical and Mystical Ways of Seeing the World

Chapter 19 is the only Chapter assigned for the tenth class in the *Gates of Understanding* program.

Chapter 19, "Religion as a Force for Healing"

Many people in the facilities I serve ask me for Kabbalistic literature and, in many cases, I provide it. Every religion has an esoteric side. For Judaism it is Kabbalah, for Christianity it is Gnosticism, and for Islam it is Sufism. If the exoteric side of religion is considered nourishment for the soul, the esoteric side would be considered medication for the soul. This Chapter is intended to satisfy participants interested in the esoteric side of spirituality. It is by far the most academic and intellectually challenging of all the Guide's chapters. It will not be everybody's favorite, but a segment of your class, if they were anything like my classes, will be deeply moved.

For those with a keen interest in deriving a therapeutic benefit from spirituality and who have a very strong passion to learn and grow, this Chapter, *Religion as a Force for Healing*, is offered. These individuals appear to want more from their spiritual life than their culture has so far provided. This appears to be a driving force behind the trend wherein many in Connecticut's correctional facilities consider themselves spiritual, but not religious or at least religious and spiritual.

Many of these individuals have described a malaise in religious institutions, a stagnant feeling from their interactions in faith houses, and an urgent need for spiritual connection. They

have felt this way for many years and know what a spiritual program looks and feels like when they encounter one. *Gates of Understanding* has met this need and greatly inspired them.

Esoteric spirituality has a very favorable impact on people who have felt stagnant in their spiritual life for a long time. The strong spiritual message is strong enough to move them from a stationary status toward vast movement in their spiritual life. The Almighty created one thing over against another. This refers to what is above in heaven and what is below on earth. As there are scientific discoveries, there are also spiritual discoveries. Sir Isaac Newton's first law of inertia shows that an object in motion will remain in motion at the same speed until a greater force impedes or stops its motion. Likewise, a stationary object will remain stationary until a greater force causes it to be moved. Likewise, esoteric spirituality can stop people who are moving in the wrong direction and can move stationary people into a flowing spiritual life.

In this Chapter, participants are introduced to three levels of Torah inquiry, (a) *peshat*, (b) *drash* and (c) *sod*. *Peshat* is establishing the basic facts of the story. *Drash* gets into the moral and meaning of the story, and *sod* delves into a profound spiritual message encrypted in the story.

In our case, the story is about Jacob's journey to his uncle Lot's home in pursuit of a wife. We see Jacob at a well where he meets Rachel. The story is shown through the lens of all three levels of inquiry. The purpose of this Chapter is to model for the participants the process of establishing the basic facts of a story, extracting the moral of the story and delving into the profound spiritual message of the story.

To advance to the deeper levels of inquiry, it becomes necessary to introduce participant to the concept of *mashal* and *nimshal*. The *mashal* in our story, involves all the things that occurred to Jacob, whereas, the *nimshal* is about how these things occur in our own lives. Personalizing our relationship to the story is necessary for deeper understanding. We

teach participants to read scripture not in a detached way but in a way that makes the narrative a story about themselves.

On the *drash* level of inquiry, if Jacob's journey is about a process of returning to his spiritual purity and innocence, we too, can identify with such a journey. The facilitator is showing the participants a process of personalizing the story and integrating its core lessons in themselves.

Because this Chapter is the most academically challenging in the Guide, it will require considerable elucidation. To succeed in this effort, I called on a participant to tell the story of the Three Little Pigs. I then asked the group if there were any details missing. After the story was recited in a form that all the participants agreed was accurate, I announced that this is the story on the level of *peshat*.

Next, I asked the group what lessons we could learn from the story. They offered answers such as, be sure to build your house with bricks, so that the Big Bad Wolf can't blow it down. You should be willing to wait for the right materials before you build your home. You must think things through before you act on them. All these answers are good and correct, and I thanked the students for their contributions. I then announced that this is the story from the level of *drash*.

I then asked the participants how we can derive deep spiritual truths from the Three Little Pigs. In all instances, I noticed that it was hard for participants to derive anything more profound from this mundane childish story. In fact, students were very amused by the question as if they were saying, "you are digging for gold where there is none to be found." One said, "It's a simple story rabbi, it doesn't go any deeper." This was common reaction in both Garner and York groups.

I then asked the participants, “What do you suppose the Wolf represents in the story?” Several answers were offered such as: the wolf is the enemy, a hazard, a threat and a predator. Some even said that the wolf represented evil. I thanked the participants for their answers and suggested we begin by exploring the wolf as a predator.

The wolf truly is a carnivorous predator, and as such, it is only natural for the wolf to prey upon pigs. But does this make the wolf evil? Isn’t the wolf just trying to eat dinner like the rest of us? We human beings are also carnivorous predators. Many of us eat chicken patties on Tuesdays. Does this make us evil? Is the wolf evil for eating pork? What then is evil? And here we find ourselves free from the literal version of the story and launched into a deeper philosophical inquiry as to the nature of evil in the world. Facilitators should encourage discussion about this question. What is virtue and what is vice? Does evil come from God or is it outside of God? If God created everything, how could evil exist outside of God? These questions cause us to bump up against the greatest mysteries of the world and we hit a wall. Nobody seems to have answers.

Another path is considered. If the big bad wolf is not evil, what is he, Saint Peter? The facilitator now suggests that from a Kabbalistic perspective, the Big Bad Wolf is neither good nor evil. And if that is so, we may no longer call this wolf a bad wolf, we must just call him the Big Wolf.

The real questions we should be asking are not the ones we can’t answer, but the ones we can answer. Here is a question we can answer. How does the Big Wolf force us to change? The Big Wolf forces us to build better homes, to be less impulsive, and to be willing to exhibit greater patience deferring pleasure for a greater reward. The Big Wolf requires us to protect ourselves. But that is not the only lesson the Big Wolf imparts to humanity. The Big Wolf forces humanity to relate to the world according to the way the world really is and not the way we

would prefer or wish it to be. The vigilance we learned to practice because of the Big Wolf, extends out to a general awareness of the many dangers we must face and the precautions we must observe.

Certainly, it would be nice if the world only required us to throw together a little straw to construct our homes and that would suffice in protecting us from the elements including predators. But haven't we all allegorically attempted living our lives in a manner that resembles building our homes out of straw when what we really needed was bricks? Why have we acted as such? If it was because of our innocence and lack of knowledge, couldn't we expect God to protect us? But the harsh reality is that God doesn't protect us from the world even if we are innocent and unaware of dangers lurking.

On an allegorical level, we have all been eaten by the wolf at one time or another, because we have all built our first homes out of straw. There is no way we could have learned how to conquer the world of nature without life experience. We have surely failed many times before we succeeded. Moreover, our spiritual evolution requires us to be eaten, that so we can learn. Eventually, we learn that we must build our life in a manner that matches the way the world is and not expect our innocence and good intentions to protect us.

We do not always know the way the world is, but it is our job to find out. When we look at the wolf as the evil force in this light, we discover that this evil wolf forces us to build better homes and better lives. Perhaps this is the reason for evil in the world. A very startling verse in the Torah states, "God creates light and darkness and all things." "All things" includes evil. Evil tests us and forces us to be stronger. Without these tests, we would not grow and evolve. Evil forces us to reach our highest potential and that is why God created it.

Now you have brought your participants to monism which is the front door to all esoteric traditions. All things are of God, both good and evil. On some level we are all the wolf

and at different stages of spiritual evolution we are either the first pig, second pig, or the third pig.

Esotericism is not about any one book or tradition but is a general perspective that believes that encrypted in all mundane incidences of daily life are found deep spiritual truths, if only we knew where, and how, to look for them. Those who have expressed an interest in Kabbalah, learn that Kabbalah is not a book, but a lens through which we may gaze and discover the way the world is on the deepest level.

Now, let's apply the *nimshal* to everything we said above. In other words, how does this apply to us? What relevance does it hold for our lives and why is it in the Guide? It applies to us because it directs us to the possibility of viewing the world on different levels of depth which is very empowering for us personally. The first level, *peshat* must not be viewed as "just" the first level. But as an incredible achievement to apply in the events of our lives. Often people do not even achieve this first level because they are too reactive and emotionally charged to put together an accurate account of the events that occurred in their lives. Without this understanding of what occurred, it is hard to move onto the *drash* level and learn the moral of the story. Several things keep us from being able to create a clear narrative in our lives, one of which is blaming others for the mishaps and the misfortunes and refusing to take emotional and logistical responsibility. Once we put together an accurate narrative of the events of our lives, we position ourselves to being able to understand life on the level of *drash* and this is a very high level of living. Achieving the level of *sod* is extraordinary and unusual. Very few people live their lives on that level.

After one masters these three ways of viewing the world, it becomes a natural life skill to quickly, and without reservation, state the facts of life in an accurate account, find practical lessons to learn from these experiences, and meditate on the underlying drivers of these

lessons. We can make the conscious decision to operate on any one of these levels and this makes our vehicle more versatile. When, for example, a person is involved in a business transaction as mundane as making a deposit into their bank account, it is often best to function on the level of *peshat* and avoid searching for deeper allegorical or mystical meaning on the levels of *drash* and *sod*. Whereas, after the transaction is completed, one could explore why they made the deposit in the way and time they did. What emotions were present when the deposit was made? What concerns did the person have at the time they made the deposit? Was there worry about scarcity of funds? Was there a feeling of abundance? How does one feel about abundance and scarcity? How will one make best use of the funds? Exploring hidden wisdom in the transaction, one could explore questions such as, how they are earning money. Are they earning their livelihood in a manner that is consistent with their values? What is money? What is materialism? How are monetary and material aspects of life supporting or inhibiting one's spiritual goals? How are monetary and spiritual aspects of life entwined? Is one being charitable with their earned income? Why should we be charitable? Is the Omnipresent charitable with us? In different situations in our lives any one of these three levels will be more appropriate than the other. In relating to others, any one of these levels will be more appropriate than the other. When we raise children the first two levels are more appropriate than the third level. It is important to help them build for themselves a foundation of clear logic and deduction before jumping into deep spiritual insights. For those in the group that are advanced academically and able to handle this conceptual framework, the Chapter will be of great interest. I know though that some will not be able to relate to it.

Class #11

Core Lesson: Projecting Love, Gaining Objectivity

Chapters 20 and 21 are the chapters assigned for the eleventh class in the *Gates of Understanding* program.

Chapter 20, “Loving Kindness Meditation”

The purpose of this Chapter is to introduce students to a known tried and true form of meditation called Loving Kindness Meditation. It starts with visualization of a blessed healthy state for oneself, moves to the same visualization for a loved one, then a neutral person and finally, towards an enemy. The most difficult visualization is extending loving kindness towards an enemy. It is a very efficacious form of meditation that quickly gets a person involved in forgiving their enemies and moving on with their life outside the cycle of revenge and hate. Extending love to an enemy is very counterintuitive, yet extremely liberating emotionally and spiritually.⁶⁶ It reinforces, in a very tangible way, that a person can adopt a spiritual practice, the core idea of having to choose love over hate and realizing that we cannot entertain both. It reinforces previous chapters particularly the Cherokee story of two wolves.

The classroom discussion that you can lead begins with: which of these four visualizations did you find most difficult? Usually, I have found that the visualizations for the enemy and the self are the most difficult for most people. The love and kindness we direct towards our self, addresses the need for self-love. We can never really love our neighbor like our self, unless we first love our self.

You can follow up with questions like: how did it feel to take a few moments and envision yourself as healthy, blessed and happy? When was the last time you sent yourself such a positive image of yourself? People will say I don’t really remember the last time I did that, but I haven’t done it very often. People usually say it feels very good. You can follow up with: If something feels so good, why in the world are we not doing it much more often? Do you see

⁶⁶ Mathew 5:44 “...Love your enemies, bless them that curse you....”

now that this is a valuable spiritual practice? It is a way that you can feel good, secure and blessed just by deciding to imagine yourself in that image. That is the power of your own mind. Nobody else can do this work for you. You must do for yourself. Society tends to emphasize all the different things we need to make a living, but none of the things we need to make a life. I do not believe that loving kindness meditation is in many school curriculums. *Gates of Understanding* provides individuals with a valuable tool they can use throughout their entire lives. The meditation works every time it is put to work.

Chapter 21, “Outside Looking In”

This Chapter describes the ability to observe the world of emotions in oneself. This observing capability can become a way of being in the world. Eventually, one realizes that this observing aspect is the essence of one’s identity. This is the achievement of detachment, or the outside looking in perspective.

A primary goal of meditative practice is to acquire this spiritual state. This Chapter provides the parable of the waves and the shore. The waves are moving and represent emotions, whereas the shore is stationary and represents the capacity to observe the emotions while remaining detached and unaffected by emotions.

The takeaway is not, do not allow yourself to feel. Rather, the takeaway is developing the ability to observe and remain detached for a defined period, so that you may gain objectivity and self-knowledge.

Class #12

Core Lesson: Harnessing the Power of Love.

Chapter 22 is the only chapter assigned for the twelfth, and final class, in the *Gates of Understanding* program.

Chapter 22, “If It Don’t Got That Love It Ain’t from Above”

This final Chapter is about the most powerful tool in every person’s spiritual toolbox—love. Love, not only in terms of kindness and compassion, but love in terms of power. The love being discussed is spiritual love and is something we learn to accept from God, humanity and the universe. Emphasized most though, is our proactive role in spreading powerful love energy and observing its effect on relationships and difficult situations. In *Gates of Understanding* we call this “The Love Zap.” [TLZ]

The facilitator teaches love as a naturally occurring substance in the universe, no less than electromagnetic energy. Just as electricity can be harnessed to improve quality of life, so can love energy be harnessed and directed to improve quality of life. The conscious decision to accept loving energy and direct loving energy to others is the most powerful spiritual tool in every persons’ toolbox; even more powerful than every form of meditation or contemplation previously discussed.

The classroom activities can be very dynamic and fascinating. The facilitator can start silently love zapping students and observing what changes occur in the room. There is a detailed explanation of the art of love zapping in the short book I wrote called *The Love Zap*. One way to love zap could simply be imagining a healing light streaming into a person’s body. This light is God’s wondrous light that makes all rough and painful places within them smooth, healthy and at peace. Before love zapping another, one should love zap themselves so that they are infused with love energy before attempting to transmit it to another. I invite the reader to pause and love zap yourself with the imagery I suggested above. Ask yourself if I have appropriately ascribed power to this practice or not. I believe you will find that the practice is instantly impactful in a radically positive way. You might even wonder why you don’t do this more often. When imagining God’s light making all rough and painful places within you smooth healthy and

at peace, I encourage you to simultaneously consciously breath. Let the flow of the light come in with the inhalation of air. The combination of the two activate a “spiritual magnetic field” within.

When changes have clearly occurred, the facilitator can pose questions such as: I noticed that for the last five minutes we’ve been laughing, can anybody explain what has happened here? Can you describe how you are feeling right now? After these changes are acknowledged and described, the facilitator should confide that he or she has been love zapping the members of the class.

What actually occurs will differ with every class and facilitator, but rest assured that when the love zap is in effect, love energy will have a positive impact that will be felt by the people towards whom it is directed.

It is a very obvious practice written into all worthy faith traditions, yet the conscious decision to actually practice it may not be happening as frequently as faith traditions had once hoped. Love zapping feels very much like rediscovering something ancient and valuable. For me as a facilitator, it felt like an ancient offering presented in a modern vessel. Facilitators are encouraged to be very creative with this presentation and be sure to practice and master the skill prior to class.

Observations

My experience leading this last class, inspired me to write a thin, but impactful book called “The Love Zap.” Facilitators should read it.

This concludes the Facilitator’s Manual and my sequential account of what happened in the project.

How Do I Know the Program Was Successful?

One of the primary goals of *Gates of Understanding* was to help participants gain techniques they can employ to help them be less reactive in stressful situations. Approximately 60% of the participants shared that the long breath meditation technique helped them not react in an emotionally unbalanced way during stressful encounters with fellow inmates. One individual shared, “First and foremost, I learned how to get in touch with my breathing. I’ve learned to calm myself down in any situation under any circumstance.”

We had created simulated drills where two participants came with their chairs to the center of the circle and sat down. One person was to practice the long breath meditation while the other berated them terribly. We discussed the encounter afterwards, and how the participant felt while being so terribly berated? We asked them if they felt empowered through the long breath meditation. They reflected in detail how the technique empowered them to feel protected from the assault. How they felt sorry for the person that felt the need to berate them. We also asked the surrounding classmates to share their observations of the behavior of the victim. The question I asked the victim was, “Do you have to respond at all?” And if you were to respond, what words would you choose? How do you think you would say those words? What tone would be most effective? We let the student try and figure that out. We asked the group to weigh in. And I suggested an empowering phrase such as, “Thanks for sharing your views, but I have a much more positive view of myself.” The students were very visibly moved by these interactions. They subsequently used these techniques in the daily lives and reported significant improvements the quality of their life the following week. Class time was dedicated to these testimonies to strengthen confidence in the techniques and teachings.

I asked the victim to devise phrase of their own and the other participants to quietly write their own as well. Some phrases they composed included, “I’ve got bigger fish to fry, I am

not reacting to this.” “I can simply excuse myself and go to the bathroom or go to my bed.” “I am going to keep the bigger picture in mind.” “I am willing to lose this battle so I can win the war.” We shared some of those as a group. We discussed this whole life skill of not reacting to people and not letting them trigger us. We discussed the importance of having a personal go to phrase before the emotional assault occurs. We explored how the long breath meditation technique slows down the heartbeat and calms the mind so that a person can think of better ways to handle themselves in hostile encounters. I know that these discussions were successful because the participants were eager to participate, and their reflections were very insightful. For example, one Garner participant shared, “I can always stop and breath and choose the healthiest response.” Another participant wrote in their journal about the discovery of inner space and peace through meditation, “I feel my anxiety leaving, I can breathe. I can sit quietly, I no longer need to leave the room to find my space, to shut out trouble. I have that peaceful space with me everywhere I go.”

The first spiritual characteristic we taught in *Gates of Understanding* was self-esteem and self-love. In one way or another, all 32 graduates affirmed that they felt their self-esteem was strengthened as a result of the program. They either said so verbally or in their journal entries. One participant expressed it succinctly, “Because I was taught, I am a princess of God, my self-esteem has flourished. I love myself today unconditionally.”

Another spiritual insight was spiritual self-sufficiency, and this was an insight that appeared to impact all participants to varying degrees. It was expressed succinctly by a participant who said, “Inhale and exhale and live! Feel that life that is within you and take control over it, and don’t let problems take control over you.” Another participant expressed it in less spiritual language, “At the *Gates of Understanding* you get what you put into it. This group really works if you work it. It can also be a wonderful beginning for the rest of your life.” I

particularly liked this type of response because in *Gates of Understanding* we shy away from the spontaneous, often short-lived, spiritual awakening and emphasized that such accomplishments are just the beginning of a life journey. I congratulated those who were visibly awakened and inspired from the class, but also reminded them that it was just the beginning and the big tests are ahead. We must keep building and growing.

Out of the 32 graduates, only 4 shied away from participating in dynamic classroom activities. A shy participant who overcame her shyness confided, “I never before liked group settings and situations, but this program was a place that made me want to open up about life and share my happiness, struggles, and anything I was going through with the class.” This feeling of wanting to open to the class was the biggest indicator of success. All the participants started out extremely guarded and closed, less so with the women, but by the second class, the entire group clearly learned to feel more at ease to share their thoughts and opinions. By the fourth session, I found that I had to start asking people to be more concise so that others had a chance to ask questions or share their thoughts and reflections. For the women, this need to be more concise began in the second session. The dynamic classroom activities were critical to establishing a sense of security and comfort among the group.

Other Spiritual Prison Ministry Programs

Other spiritual prison ministry programs that I researched for this project included two Buddhist programs that emphasized Mindfulness Meditation. *Dharma in Hell* by Fleet Maull,⁶⁷ and *We're All Doing Time* by Bo Lozoff⁶⁸ were two books that strengthened my resolve to spend

⁶⁷ Maull, Fleet. *Dharma in Hell: The Prison Writings of Fleet Maull*. Los Angeles: Prison Dharma Network, 2005.

⁶⁸ Lazoff, Bo, and Dalai Lama XIV (Foreword). *We're All Doing Time: A Guide To Getting Free*. Durham, North Carolina: Human Kindness Foundation, 2017.

time doing meditations with the students under my rubric of dynamic classroom activities.

However, the types of meditation I taught in *Gates of Understanding*, Long Breath Meditation and Loving Kindness Meditation are quite different than the Mindfulness Meditation that Maull and Lozoff teach, and better serves the needs of incarcerated populations.

Long Breath Meditation fits the needs of incarcerated populations much more so than Mindfulness Meditation for several reasons. The key problem with incarcerated populations is impulsivity and reactive nature. The type of meditative technique that will be most effective for domestic abusers, drug addicts and thrill-seeking bank robbers at the time they are triggered, is Long Breath Meditation because its effects are delivered almost immediately. It is a form of meditation that does not require a gentle voice guiding practitioners for twenty minutes about the feel of their body and the sounds in the room. By that time, domestic violence, drug uptake and banks robberies will have already occurred. In no way do I diminish the value of Mindfulness Meditation, but I am working with incarcerated populations with very specific problems that need to be addressed in very specific ways in very sensitive time frames. Long Breath Meditation instantly slows down the heart rate and restores normal cognitive functioning.

I challenge the reader to empty their lungs and take a breath through the nose as slowly as possible. When you think you've filled up your lungs to the brim, fill it a little more and hold it there for 5 seconds, and then let it out as slowly as possible through your lips as if you were blowing through a straw. You will find an immediate calming effect which is directly due to slowing of the heart rate and increased oxygen in the blood stream. It is a condition that can be gained in less than a minute. That is the kind of meditative technique inmates need when triggered and that is why I chose this approach over the Mindfulness Meditation approach.

As for a slower moving meditation that requires at least fifteen minutes, I still did not opt for Mindfulness Meditation, but chose instead *Loving Kindness Meditation* because it is tied to another specific need of incarcerated populations----the need to forgive and end the cycle of violence. *Loving Kindness Meditation* is also more rooted in something familiar to most inmates, the Biblical concept of forgiving one's enemies and those that persecute you. [Matthew 5:44] As such, it made more sense to put more eggs in that basket, than a less relevant form of meditation. It also connected to the goal of the program which culminated in the power of love as the most impactful form of spiritual practice.

Certainly Mindfulness Meditation is a wonderful highly popular exercise that focuses the mind. Loving Kindness Meditation however, satisfies more urgent needs of my parishioners, and it focuses the mind no less than Mindfulness Meditation. Instead of focusing the mind on body sensations and sounds, it focuses the mind on sending loving vibrations to not only oneself, loved ones, and neutral persons, but to one's enemies. There is a much greater return on *Loving Kindness Meditation* than Mindfulness Meditation particularly in incarcerated populations. Moreover, Loving Kindness Meditation addresses another need among incarcerated populations, the need to be less self-absorbed and more thoughtful of other people. Returning citizens have an urgent need to repair their broken relationships and therefore, investing loving energy into their relationships is by far a better use of their time and effort. Loving Kindness Meditation is completely about relationships whereas Mindfulness Meditation is usually about oneself.

Healing Houses, A Prisoner's Guide to Inner Power and Freedom⁶⁹ by psychologist Robin Casarjian was also important for this project. I have used aspects of her book for several years

⁶⁹ Caesarian, Robin. *Houses of Healing: A Prisoner's Guide to Inner Power and Freedom*. Boston, MA: Lionheart, 2008.

and found it to be extremely helpful with my pastoral counseling. I reached out to Robin Casarjian in June the summer of 2017 and in that conversation, Robin shared the following information:

The Lion Heart Foundation located in Boston, Massachusetts is the home base for Houses of Healing. The book has been donated to every prison library in the country. They do their own publishing and it is called Lionheart press. The first edition of the book came out in 1995. It is not a religious book, but it is spiritual. The program is founded on psychological principles and directs inmates to address the underlying psychological issues that cause resentment and violence. It speaks about the wounded child within and how one might be able to reframe things, take control and live a better and happier life.

The data that they have collected is not rigorous, however they are now beginning to gather substantial data and they have received some government grants to do so. Their current study involves 450 men involved in a 14-session program. 160 evaluations are being done. They are measuring the efficacy of mindfulness. Once again, the emphasis of her program is Mindfulness Meditation and not Loving Kindness Meditation.

I am a rabbi and Robin is a psychologist. I find many useful aspects in Robin's work. However, if you read her book and read my manuscript, I believe most readers will find that it is harder to get into Houses of Healing without an instructor than Spiritual Guide for the Incarcerated. For my purposes of building spiritual practices, it is very important that my students are engaged in the core curriculum outside of class and for that reason, as much as I admire Robin's work, Spiritual Guide for the Incarcerated is a more effective book than Houses of Healing. Most of the chapters of the Guide have been shared with inmates throughout the state and the feedback has been very positive. People read it and are immediately able to

converse about it. Houses of Healing needs to be taught, whereas the Guide can hold the interest of the reader by itself. The stories are intriguing and memorable.

When I shared my ministry project with Robin, she advised me to seek out the work of Bo Lozoff, author of We're All Doing Time⁷⁰ who I had already researched. Lozoff's program is the Prison Ashram Project and he has a foundation called the Human Kindness Foundation located in Durham, North Carolina. The Human Kindness Foundation began as a family project in 1971 via young hippies eager to establish personal connections with incarcerated people. They were not interested in collecting data, just doing the work. They have a mailing list of over 40,000 subscribers and many glowing testimonials are published in the book. It is a very personal approach. Bo, now deceased, was a very talented singer songwriter and an accomplished Jonny Cash impersonator. He had a solid act which can be viewed on You Tube. He incorporated his musical performances with his public presentations to great effect.

Robin also advised me to investigate the work of Fleet Maul who I had already researched as well. Maul established the Prison Mindfulness Institute. He was incarcerated for exporting drugs from Peru to the United States and served a 14-year sentence. He had already been involved in Buddhist practices at the time and became a more serious Buddhist during the years of his incarceration. Maul had decided to gather much data from his programs. His main book is *Dharma in Hell* and his organization is Prison Mindfulness Institute.

⁷⁰ Lazoff, Bo, and Dalai Lama XIV (Foreword). *We're All Doing Time: A Guide To Getting Free*. Durham, North Carolina: Human Kindness Foundation, 2017.

CHAPTER SEVEN EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

A. Changes to the Original Plan

Originally, I had planned to provide some private pastoral counseling to the participants, but that was impractical due to my limited hours in the facilities and the large number of students in the program. A few individuals with more serious problems did receive some personal counseling, but the time allowed for this was limited to about 15 minutes at the end of each session. Finding even that was difficult because some of the students needed to get to the last call of “med line” or they would miss their medication for the day. I was mindful of not being disruptive of normal functions of the facility.

At first, I contemplated assigning more reading but determined that even with the small amount of reading assignments I gave out in *Gates of Understanding*, not everyone did the assignments. Each class had 2-3 people who appeared to have not done the reading.

Sixteen out of twenty-two students graduated in both groups. Each had attended twelve sessions of two-hour duration as originally planned plus a graduation ceremony. Nearly all the students did the written work in their journal and many flourished in that activity. A few wrote very little, but these individuals except two, shared verbally during class in a meaningful manner reflecting their learning.

Originally, I was going to start the program discussing the first chapter of the Spiritual Guide, but that would have required me to distribute that chapter prior to the first session. That turned out to be an unrealistic goal for myself. This altered the lesson plan, but by session two

we were back in sync with the syllabus. However, this delay worked out well because there was more than enough to do in the first session without the discussion of the first chapter. I would run the next program the way I did in this first offering concerning that point.

The first dynamic classroom activity was a trust game which I altered from the original plan. Originally, I was going to have students fall backwards and be caught by a classmate, but that seemed too dangerous and an unrealistic level of trust to expect to occur at the first class. The activity was modified upon the recommendation of my inmate advisor. The initial check-in didn't flow in the Garner group. Generally, all the students would say was their name and cell block. They would not voluntarily share where they lived on the outside. It did not take long to realize that dynamic games and activities was the best way to run the group. *Gates of*

Understanding

Lecture style can work, but only after the dynamic activities. The whole mood and energy in the room changed entirely after the dynamic activities. Suddenly, people would be joking and laughing and being themselves without reservation. Due to those observations, I decided to begin each class right away with a dynamic activity or media clip. Reading and lecturing is not the only, or best, way to transmit knowledge with these groups.

B. Additional Indications of Success

Participants loved the dynamic activities and writing in their journals. Everybody wrote in their journals and many wrote prolifically. Two individuals from York filled up all the pages of their journal book and requested another notebook, and one participant from Garner did the same. One woman ran out of ink and requested another pen. Another woman from York discovered that she liked to write poems and shared several of her poems with the class.

One individual was eager for me to retain her journal, so I did. Students from both groups expressed powerful emotions which included crying and laughing with abandon. Only

one refused being the subject of the Nazarite vow which was a very tough process involving difficult critical feedback. For example, two people in the Garner group were told unanimously by the judges that they did not believe that these individuals attempting to invoke the Nazarite vow had enough resolve to quit using drugs. The judges detected a weak use of words by both supplicants. The phrase they focused upon was “I will try my best” as language inconsistent with a solemn vow, and as such, they believed that these individuals, would not be strong enough to fulfill it.

When this occurred, we discussed how failure is one stepping stone away from success. I asked both individuals how they felt about being rejected by the judges. Both did not mind and expressed the idea that until they had attempted to make this vow to quit using, they were not sure where they were regarding their resolve to quit. Participating in the vow ceremony provided them a sense of where they were on their journey to sobriety and where they needed to get to. It was a helpful baseline reading. They were not used to receiving such critical feedback. Most of the people they hung around with were enablers or gullible, not people who would hold them accountable to their professed promises. All supplicants, men and women who approached the three judges of the Beit-Din⁷¹ became tearful as they made their vows. They appeared to appreciate the opportunity to receive help. This was apparent because they were listening intently to all the feedback and never once showed, through body language, an interest in exiting the hot seat or the activity.

Even the most stoic characters amongst the men at Garner; successful drug dealers and those that rob drug dealers, opened to the group and told their stories in detail and emotion.

⁷¹ Beit Din, literally, house of judgement, is the way civil disputes were settled in Jewish communities throughout history. It was comprised of three judges who met with litigants informally in synagogues or in private homes.] A Beth din (Hebrew: בית דין Bet Din, "house of judgement" [bet 'din], Ashkenazic: beis din) is a rabbinical court of Judaism. In ancient times, it was the building block of the legal system in the Biblical Land of Israel.

One of the drug dealers declined to follow through with his Nazarite vow. On one occasion this same individual, who was one of the two alpha males of the group, broke out into uncontrollable hysterical laughter when he spoke about a man sitting in his living room looking at his beautiful daughter. In the story, the man decided to stop selling drugs for the sake of his family, only to be arrested the next morning notwithstanding his intention of turning his life around.

To this observer, the person in the story was himself and his bizarre laughter was a way to cover up his profound weeping, which I understood to be inconsistent with the alpha male image he felt compelled to uphold. It was clear to me that had this individual taken the hot seat before the three judges, he would have wept uncontrollably. He knew he would be asked if the man sitting in the living room was himself and if his previous laughter may be weeping in disguise. He explained that he knew we did not come to this activity to play and that it was serious, and the judges could detect insincerity and were empowered to express everything they perceived in a straightforward, no holds barred manner. He still had it engrained in himself that he could not let his guard down completely, and weeping would be just that, letting his guard down completely. He has a very long sentence, and he will miss the opportunity to be fully present for his daughter's childhood unless the laws change in his favor or he gets out on parole.

C. Closer Engagement with the Deputy Warden

To avert some of the issues I had with guards who periodically refused to allow one or two inmates to attend class, the next time I run *Gates of Understanding*, I would engage more with the Deputy Warden. I will ask him/her to draft a letter on behalf of the program and sign off on the student roster which will be attached to the letter. The content of the letter will spell

out clearly his/her expectation that all staff members will fully cooperate in assisting and enabling the student's participation in the program.

D. Graduation Ceremonies

The York Graduation ceremony was the best one because Deputy Warden Zegarzewski gave us permission to serve juice and cookies and each student was given permission to invite up to two approved guests on their visiting list. Eight of the women invited family members. The women arrived together as a group. They were clean, well-groomed and some were even wearing makeup. They really made a huge effort to look their best. I gave a description of each student and then I called out the name of the student and she came up to receive her certificate of graduation. Before I called the name of the student, I could tell that all the other students knew whose name I was going to call. We really got to know each other well in the *Gates of Understanding*. I had two female officers with me, and I asked them to shake the hands of the women after they received their certificates, because I was not permitted to do so myself. The students understood that the officers were shaking their hands on my behalf and the guards knew it too. In fact, these female guards were visibly moved by the ceremony. They told me at the end that it was a special ceremony and was one of the best nights they have had working at York.

The content of the ceremony involved my reflections on how things were when we first gathered and how we grew over the four months we were in session. We reviewed the core values and our positive vision for the future. I also addressed the family members and stated the accomplishments of the graduates to them. I shared my confidence in their ability to thrive and succeed. I blessed the group with the three-fold blessing⁷² asking for God's protection, guidance, kindness and peace. Everybody said amen and we went to enjoy the refreshments.

⁷² Number 6:24-26

The Garner graduation ceremony was less eventful, but Deputy Warden Kimberly Jones was there to congratulate the graduates and that added a lot. The men were very proud to receive their certificates of graduation. I shook their hands and said a few personal words to each one. "I believe in you man." And "success is your destiny" were a few phrases I said softly to each graduate. They too were well groomed, clean and prepared themselves in an excellent fashion for the event. They did not arrive all at once though and trickled in like they usually did when they came to class.

E. Advice

Make sure you not only have permission from the administration, make sure you have the full backing of the administration. Ask them to put it in writing in such a way that it will be transmitted down the chain of command. Every facility will have different protocols and procedures for programs. Do not wait for people to tell you how to do it. Be proactive and ask open-ended questions such as, "Deputy Warden, what do I need to do to make this program completely official. Are there any forms I need to fill out, so that the message gets transmitted down the chain of command? What advice can you give me to help things go as smoothly as possible?

Make thoughtful plans but be ready to abandon those plans as soon as you see they aren't working. When you are in front of people, there are dynamics and conditions that you may not have anticipated. What seemed like a good idea in the planning stage, may not be effective in practice. I experienced this at Garner at the first class when the check-in and meditation failed to create the warm nurturing environment needed for success. When I shifted to the dynamic activity, everything changed for the better. From that point forward, I was sure to schedule the dynamic activity at the start of each class which was the opposite of what I had initially

planned.

Social learning in this ministry setting is much more effective than assigning reading. But keep in mind that just because some people do not like to read, does not mean that they do not like to write. When you engage people in social dynamic learning, they become much more receptive to a discussion about the reading or listening to a lecture. When you speak with inmates, do not take notes, it can make them feel like you are studying them. A lot of inmates have been through the foster care system and case workers taking notes about them doesn't always conjure up pleasant memories. This is a lesson I learned. I started out taking notes and decided to abandon the practice. It is better to make eye contact and be fully present. You can write a verbatim afterwards if you want to preserve aspects of the conversation. And knowing that you are going to write a verbatim will help you pay extra careful attention.

You must be vulnerable if you want your participants to be vulnerable. You will have to start it off. How did I demonstrate my own vulnerability? When I volunteered to be the first person led around the room with closed eyes through the maze of chairs, this was an act of vulnerability. I also shared how I used the power of love to overcome difficult events in my own life. I described that struggle in detail and was personable. I also shared how my use of the *Love Zap* technique brought my family members closer together.

Check the inmate files before you start the class, so you have had some practice recognizing their faces and names. Their record is of less importance, because you are dealing with a cultivated self-selecting group that are generally not getting tickets in the facilities and are already engaging in educational and vocational offerings in the facility. Your program is not going to significantly impact that. Where they are today is more important than where they were when they first came to prison. You are going to inspire them to adopt new spiritual practices and pro-social attitudes.

Powerful video clips from YouTube are a great tool to launch your class in the right direction. Be prepared to lead an insightful discussion about the clips.

Do not be afraid to cut students off who are dominating too much time in class. Tell them you would be happy to spend a few minutes after class discussing their valuable comments. Let them know you have points to cover.

Never confuse illiteracy with a lack of intelligence. You have many weak readers who have the intelligence to be the CEO of a major corporation.

Don't assume that rich and highly intelligent inmates are necessarily very emotionally intelligent. These are two different things.

In general, do not make assumptions about people. Be a great and compassionate listener so that you can really get to know your participants.

Be yourself. And if you are funny, allow your natural funny qualities to come out. Every facilitator has different strengths to draw upon. You must know your strengths and figure out how you can put them to best use.

F. What the Project Meant to the Participants

Four York women joined my Jewish group after the program was completed. All four frequently referred to their lives in terms of before *Gates of Understanding* and after *Gates of Understanding*. They spoke about the *Gates of Understanding* being a program where a ton of knowledge was dropped on them. One woman remarked, "I felt so much better after every class. Life became exciting because I had these new skills to try out." Recently, I bumped into a roommate of one of the graduates 9 months after graduation. The roommate said, "I don't know what you did, but Julie [fictitious name] is extremely positive now, she really turned her life around thanks to you." Another woman who was extremely depressed at the start of the program, signed up for the canine unit. She loves training and caring for dogs. She does that for

hours every day and she is also taking classes at in the educational program several times a week. She went from being depressed and reclusive to happy and active with color in her cheeks and a sparkle in her eyes. Another woman was selected to be a mentor at the W.O.R.T.H. program for troubled women in their 20's, a coveted job at York.⁷³ Another woman became a regular student in Wally Lamb's writing class. One woman who had been having terrible conflicts with her roommate tried *Love Zapping* her instead of retaliating. She described how she turned it all around one day. Instead of defending herself or counter attacking, she looked at her with loving eyes and just said, "Oh sweetie, I know you are hurting, and it hurts me too that you are in so much pain." This comment stunned her roommate. Both women broke down and cried. After that they embraced and became good friends. Another woman started writing poems every day. She confided that before this, she never wrote a poem in her life. Something changed in her mind and it all came pouring out in poetic writings. She proudly shared them all with me and some with the class.

As for the Garner men, I met up with a Garner man in another facility while touring on his block. Like a kid in a candy store, he said, "wait here, I've got something to show you." He went and got a half a dozen journal books he had filled in entirely since the last time he saw me at the program 9 months earlier. He eagerly explained that different notebooks were for different projects in his life. The next time I saw him he was having a private lesson in the school with a volunteer teacher. I met another man, also 9 months after the program, who previously had had an agitated presenting manner, was now presenting in a very poised and resolute demeanor. He told me about his plans to make things right with his family. Another man said, "Rabbi, I have never known a priest, or a pastor or a member of the clergy who was so patient and honest. Rabbi, you explain things so clearly and you've made a real difference in my life. You

⁷³ The acronym stands for Women Overcoming Recidivism Through Hard Work.

give me hope that I can be forgiven for my crime someday.” A Catholic man who maintained his innocence said, “The concept of me being a prince of God has never crossed my mind before. This *Gates of Understanding* program has been an interesting journey for me. I was taught as a child that there was only one way to God and that was our way. This course taught me that there are many ways to be connected to the Father.” A man who was doing PCP on a regular basis in the streets said, “I’m tired of feeding the bad wolf and am ready to start feeding the good wolf.” A man from a gang background shared, “I’m glad I was part of this because the way I was going before I attended this program, I probably would be in SEG [segregated custody] or get myself transferred by now. But now that I know what I know now, these negative things won’t be happening anymore.” Another man shared, “I didn’t expect to get so much insight from different racial backgrounds and how diverse the conversations would get.” Concerning the comfort level of the participants, another man shared, “I noticed everyone felt comfortable to open up and share things including bad things that happened.” And concerning skills for dealing with conflicts another man shared, “I learned techniques how to deal with conflicts in every situation through breathing exercises.” Another man spoke about the teaching being both logical and compassionate, “The heartfelt logical teachings and the compassion showered upon the group of inmates was an eye opener.” And in conclusion, one of the men put it very succinctly, “I entered the program as a prisoner and left as a Prince of God.”

G. What the Project Meant to Me

Facilitating *Gates of Understanding* provided me with a very strong sense of meaning and purpose in my life. Prior to the project my life had plenty of meaning, but this project significantly increased my inner sense of meaning and purpose. It felt like I was doing what I was put here in this world to do. My efforts were greatly appreciated and praised by the inmates and to be honest, that felt great. I was glad that I was able to bring so much joy and meaning to my

participants. Having an opportunity to touch others in a deep and heartfelt way is a wonderful and rare blessing. The program format enabled me to teach what I most enjoy teaching, the universal spiritual lessons taught in the great religions of the world as tools for living. I am thankful that God has kept me in life to reach this joyous time.

H. Plans

I intend to move from phase one to phase two which is the training of clergy and other helping professionals to be facilitators of *Gates of Understanding* prison ministry. I have shared my interest in proliferating *Gates of Understanding* throughout the state through a volunteer force with influential people in the field and I am taking steps each day to bring this plan to fruition.

I set myself up to do a huge project, and to be honest, sometimes I felt like I took on too much. But sometimes that is all I know how to do---too much. Some would evaluate me more favorably and say I am ambitious. And so, I admit it. I was, and I continue to be ambitious. So many late Thursday nights in York striking away at the keys and rolling back into Fairfield after midnight, only to continue thinking and writing at home before unwinding sufficiently to fall asleep. So many late nights, into the wee hours of the morning, at Denny's in West Haven, exit 42 off Interstate 95. They know me there. It was there that I read and wrote the most. I would sometimes fall asleep for a little while with my head slumped over the page of my traditional composition notebooks. To be honest, I loved doing this doctoral degree. I am appreciative for being able to make this journey with my classmates, professors and participants. I appreciate the supportiveness of my family.

Reflecting on some coursework that prepared me for this project. The sociological grounding was a necessary mantra whose battle cry I understood to say, "strive to understand the way society behaves even though it's not the way you would necessarily prefer it to behave.

Be a social scientist along with being a spiritual leader in your ministry. This way your sociological skill set will constantly inform and effectively advise you to pursue new dynamic ministry programs that answer a need that exists in a specific target population.”

What makes that population unique is the fact that they are incarcerated and are people who value spirituality more, or as much, as religion. For some of these individuals who became my students, the incarceration was a punishment, but for others, it was precisely the intervention they desperately needed.

If there was a stronger mental health system, there could be better venues for *Gates of Understanding*, but there aren't enough mental health facilities. There are reasons why this is so, but that question is beyond the scope of this paper. I will hint at it though. I believe it has to do with modern industrial societies that place a great deal of value on individualism to such an extent that the existence of community does not exist for many citizens. About this, the Torah said “It is not good for humankind to be alone.” [Genesis 2:18]

Prisons are the last safety net that some would call a trap, but be it as it may, York and Garner are offering rehabilitative services and welcomed my project.

The Doctor of Ministry course readings and reflective work were a great process enabling me to find the right ministry project for my unique life journey. Many things came together in *Gates of Understanding*. It met the needs of my target population and it met my needs as well. I needed a bigger audience, I needed to teach Spiritual Guide for the Incarcerated because that is the pastoral material that came through me while I was touring heavily in my home facility, Bridgeport Correctional Center. That was my laboratory. I would go into the blocks and tell jokes, chant prayers, tell stories, play my violin, ask questions and engage people in conversation and pastoral counseling. This is where the inspiration to write the book was born. I started giving out my book one or two chapters at a time--- thousands of copies over the years.

The feedback from the inmates and several guards, came back immediately, strong and passionate—they loved it! I also had an impact upon my fellow chaplains with whom I shared chapters with as well.

I completed the book and submitted it along with a query letter to a major literary agent; received an immediate reply and two days later signed a contract. The publishing of the book, Spiritual Guide for the Incarcerated is an important next step for my goal of moving *Gates of Understanding* onto phase two. I need to cross that threshold of publishing and promoting my philosophy, methods and curriculum in the public square. It will take money, resources and organization to grow the ministry that I envision. Getting Spiritual Guide for the Incarcerated, and *Gates of Understanding* into correctional facilities throughout the country are the next steps.

Networking is a big part of it. We learned much about this from Professor Michael Piazza of Hartford Seminary. I am fortunate to be in the presence of experts in the field. It is a lot easier to hatch a thoughtful ministry under the careful watch and guidance of known masters in the field. Professor Scott Thumma got his message across. The world has changed and the sooner we track and understand these changes, the sooner we shall discover effective ministry strategies. Prison ministry, especially interfaith spiritual ministry in the criminal justice system, is a serious need in our society and I am ready to make my mark.

I have observed that society responds to authors who succeed in publishing and disseminating their thoughts, philosophies and social designs. Therefore, the task of selling the book, and doing all the things one must do to sell the book, is critical. When I do sell the book, I can expect more people to come forth to help me grow the ministry. I know I cannot do everything myself that needs to take place for success. It will take people from many walks of life and skill to grow *Gates of Understanding* as an impactful and enduring ministry. I am prepared to go the distance.

Chapter 7

Summary of the Project

I had a well thought out plan and I executed it well. I was also flexible enough to modify it along the way. I learned a lot and I taught a lot. I could do it even better next time. Looking towards the future, I will also consider checking up on my participant's welfare after five years from the graduation date. Will my students retain the spiritual awakening and spiritual practices they acquired from the class? I believe many will. Will I meet them in correctional facilities or out in the free world?

I undertook a ministry action that succeeded in enabling me to engage with the general population with a universal spiritual message. I created a certain ethos in Spiritual Guide for the Incarcerated that was written in the trenches of Connecticut correctional facilities. The novel thoughts, hatched usually after a pastoral tour of a housing unit, were well preserved in my writing. I took my best pastoral messages and put them into a concentrated form that addressed core issues of incarcerated populations.

Gates of Understanding was a success. It engaged, inspired and motivated the participants to continue their new habits of self-reflection, the long breath meditation, loving kindness meditation, spiritual emotional learning, reading and journaling. When I walked out the main exit after the graduation ceremony at York, the very last thing I did for this project, an officer who was watching the whole thing from inside the central control bubble said, "Wow, you are really onto something here. The Love Zap and the Spiritual Guide. You've really got something here man, I mean it!" I wish to reinforce one more time, there are extraordinarily good natured and dedicated people working in the Department of Correction, including the

custody staff who are doing it for all the right reasons. I stand with them as their brother and friend.

I feel that the Omnipresent has opened the *Gates of Understanding* for me too, and it is up to me to walk through it. I am appreciative of the success I have had so far. I will continue innovating, writing and implementing. Praised be the Omnipresent and the pursuit of knowledge to uplift the people. The Spirit of God dwells in prisons and in all places where people cry out in earnest. “And the Almighty heard their cries from the midst of Egypt and redeemed them.”⁷⁴ In the end, the service is about freeing the incarcerated, loosening their bonds, redeeming their souls and setting them free from the prisons that society built for them and from the prisons they built for themselves. May this work be just the beginning of great things to come.

⁷⁴ Exodus 3:7

Appendix

Appendix [1]

*Gates of Understanding***Student Application** [Please take your time and write clearly]

Section 1

1. Date
2. Inmate number
3. Housing and cell
4. Age
5. Facility
6. Length of sentence
7. Type of sentence
8. Length of time in this facility
9. Are you married, or do you have a significant other(s)?
 10. Do you have children? If so, how many, and what are their names and ages?
 11. What is your sexual orientation LGBTQ or straight?
 12. Where is your home or intended home on the outside?
 13. What is your level of education? [a] Grade school [b] Middle school [c] High school or GED, [d] College, [e] Post graduate? {Circle one}
 14. Describe your educational involvement in each of the following areas during your incarceration? [a] Academic, [b] Vocational, [c] Personal Development?
 15. Languages you speak read and write? Describe your abilities in each.
 16. Do you read on a regular basis? What do you enjoy reading?
 17. Did you have a job on the outside? If so, please describe your work history.
 18. Do you have a job on the inside? If so, please describe your work history.

Section 2

Describe your religious background including any religious denomination(s) in which you were raised, as well as the frequency of your attendance in a house of worship?

2. Describe your current religious involvement and spiritual outlook? What role do you think your incarceration has played in your current interest and involvement in religion and/or spirituality?

3. Describe a memorable spiritual experience and your interpretation of the experience.

4. Why do you want to join the *Gates of Understanding* program?

5. What are your strengths and weaknesses?

6. What areas of your character do you wish to improve?

7. *Gates of Understanding* is a very demanding program with homework requirements that includes reading and writing. Are you willing to fulfill your responsibilities?

8. Are you willing to share personal things with your classmates?

9. Are you willing to participate in meditation and dynamic class activities including skits and discussions?

10. Are you willing to respect the confidentiality of your classmates and our rule that whatever is said and done in the room, stays in the room?

11. What do you think you will find most difficult about the program?

12. What do you hope to accomplish in the program?

13. Are you prepared to attend at least 10 out of the 12 sessions?

14. *Gates of Understanding* is an interfaith program and we do not make judgments about any faith, or people who do not practice a faith, or people who are atheists. Are you willing to abide by this rule and respect your fellow students regardless of their views and involvement with Faith?

15. *Gates of Understanding* is seeking highly motivated students who are trying to improve their life. Does this describe you?

16. Are you willing to keep a daily journal?

17. Have you ever participated in meditation?

18. Are you willing to affirm the worth and human dignity of all people regardless of their race, political affiliation, religion and sexual orientation?

*****If you need more room to write, write on the back and be sure to number your answers*****

Gates of Understanding



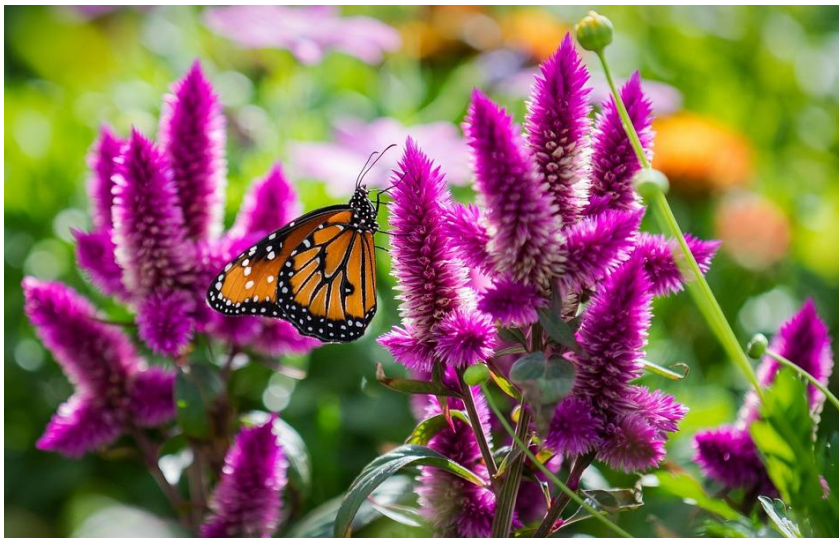
Increase Self-Knowledge & Spiritual Wellness in a twelve-week program based on universal wisdom. Learn to be happier in and out of prison. Learn to be high on life and become the very best version of yourself. Others have succeeded and so can you! Opportunity is calling, it's time to answer!

- ✓ **Facilitator: Chaplain-Rabbi Shaul Prayer**
- ✓ **When: Wednesdays, 1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.**
- ✓ **Where: Classroom #1,**
- ✓ **Who: General Population**
- ✓ **Starting: Wednesday, September 6th, 2017**
- ✓ **Space: Eighteen seats are available**
- ✓ **Responsibility: 5 hours of reading and writing per week**
- ✓ **Due date: Must submit application by, Wednesday, August 16th, 2017**

Follow these instructions carefully:

Request an application form by writing on the back side of this flyer or any other piece of paper: [a] Your full name, [b] Inmate number, [c] Housing Assignment, [d] Work/School Schedule and location. Fold and place in the U.S. mailbox. [No Stamp Required] Chaplain Prayer will deliver an application form to you in your housing unit or work/school location. Fill it out, place it in the envelope it arrived in and place your completed application form in the U.S. mailbox. [No Stamp Required]

Gates of Understanding



Increase Self-Knowledge & Spiritual Wellness in a twelve week program based on universal wisdom. Learn to be happier in and out of prison. Learn to be high on life and become the very best version of yourself. Others have succeeded and so can you! Opportunity is calling, it's time to answer!

- ✓ Facilitator: Chaplain-Rabbi Shaul Praver
- ✓ When: Thursdays 6:30 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.
- ✓ Where: Building #2, Multi-Purpose Room, Westside
- ✓ Who: General Population
- ✓ Starting: Thursday, September 7th, 2017
- ✓ Space: Eighteen seats are available
- ✓ Responsibility: 5 hours of reading and writing per week
- ✓ Due date: Must submit application by, Thursday, August 17th, 2017

Follow These Instructions carefully:

Request an application form by writing on the back side of this flyer or any piece of paper: [a] Full Name, [b] Inmate Number, [c] Housing Assignment, [d] Work/School Schedule and Location. Fold and place in U.S. mailbox [No Stamp required]. Chaplain Praver will personally deliver an Application Form to you in your housing unit or work/school location. Fill out the application, place it in the envelope it arrived in, address it to: Chaplain Praver Building #6 Chaplain's office, and place it in a U.S. mailbox. [No Stamp Required]

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